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Beyond the "women-friendly" welfare state: framing gender inequality as a policy problem in Spanish and Swedish politics of care

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and Swedish politics of care

Doctoral thesis by: Elin Peterson

Supervisor: María Bustelo

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Universidad Complutense de Madrid
Facultad de Ciencia Política y Sociología
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y Administración II

Más allá del Estado del bienestar “favorable a las mujeres”

La desigualdad de género como un problema público en las políticas en torno a los cuidados en España y Suecia

Tesis doctoral de: Elin Peterson

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1 Introduction

1.1 Aim and research questions

Gender and care are central themes in this thesis. Given the sexual division of labour whereby women, and not men, perform the lion's share of care and domestic work, feminist welfare state research has made care a central theme. All welfare states position themselves in relation to the political location of care work: how it should be performed, by whom and where (Sundström 2003). Welfare state models where the state extensively assumes responsibility for care provision have been regarded as more favourable for women, more "women-friendly" (Lewis 1992; Anttonen 2005; Sainsbury 1999; Daly 2001). The social organization of care can be considered a crucial issue on the political agenda in many European welfare states in the context of ageing populations, welfare state restructurings and the norm of dual earner families (Leira and Saraceno 2002). At the same time, welfare states are in constant change and their boundaries are continually (re)negotiated in the context of globalization, Europeanization and neo-liberal policies. By analyzing current policies surrounding care we can understand processes of change in European welfare states. The globalization of care and domestic work has become an important phenomenon where welfare state provision is scarce. The phenomenon of "global care chains", with migrant women leaving their own families to perform care and domestic work in households in the First World, adds weight to the argument that care is a central point of reference in analyzing social policy. What is more, this phenomenon definitively points at the complexity of the problem of gender inequality.

The thesis sets out to explore how gender inequality has been framed as a policy problem in European politics of care in the period between 1995 and 2010. To this end, I analyze how gender inequality has been framed as a policy problem in two European welfare states; Spain and Sweden. I define the politics of care as the politics of constructing meanings of care and I analyze three different policy debates which revolve around care and domestic work, traditionally associated with "women's work": the "reconciliation of work and family life", "care for dependent people" and "domestic service". These debates reveal different and shifting interpretations of the relationship between gender (in)equality and the welfare state. I consider these policy debates as reflecting the (re)construction and (de)legitimation of the welfare state and the analysis reveals the continuous negotiation of welfare state boundaries.

The analysis of the different policy debates aims to contribute to our understanding of gender and the welfare state in the European context. Thus, I see the study as situated within feminist welfare state research, which is the body of analysis that I aim to contribute to. The theoretical framework of the thesis critically assesses some of the normative assumptions of comparative feminist welfare state studies. This literature has tended to offer a vision of gender equality in line with the dual earner model, based on the taken-for-granted assumption that women's participation in the labour market is the key to gender equality. Exclusionary representations of gender equality, defined as equality only for white, heterosexual, working mothers, can be found. Comparative

gender and welfare state studies often ignore the ways in which dominant state discourses privilege some women and men over others. They do not sufficiently explore differences between women, neither do they reflect sufficiently upon the differences within states (Kantola and Dahl 2005). Taking this criticism seriously, the feminist welfare state analysis that I attempt to develop in this thesis allows for an examination of different, dominant and marginal, representations of gender inequality as a policy problem and it scrutinizes the underlying normative assumptions underpinning such representations (Bacchi 1999; Verloo 2007). Rather than thinking about Nordic welfare states as essentially “women-friendly” and Southern European welfare states as fundamentally “women-unfriendly”, I emphasize that, depending on how policies define and construct gender and gender inequality in specific contexts, they can have empowering and/or disempowering effects on women –and men.

The project is guided by the principal research question: “how is gender inequality constructed in the politics of care?”. In order to tackle this question, a number of supplementary questions were developed:

1. How is gender inequality articulated as a policy problem in the welfare states of Spain and Sweden?
2. What are the normative assumptions and silences underpinning these problem representations?
3. What normative assumptions are shared across countries? What are the context-bound differences and silences?

The aim of the first question is to explore the articulation of gender inequality as a policy problem in the politics of care in Spain and Sweden. The purpose is to analyze the way in which gender inequality is produced as a problem and thus given certain meanings while obscuring others. By focusing on policies surrounding care, a central aspect of the welfare state from a feminist point of view, I examine the linkages between gender (in)equality and the welfare state in different contexts. The construction of public and private problems are explored and thus the shifting boundaries of the welfare state. The second question is closely linked to the first one and deals with the normative assumptions underpinning the problem representations –and the solutions offered. The dominating narratives and their silences are in focus with the aim to reveal the normative subjects of gender equality policies, and processes of exclusion. The third question aims to compare the Spanish and Swedish case studies, examining what normative assumptions are shared across countries, what the differences are and what the silences in each national context are. Contrasting the case studies is useful in order to get a better understanding of how gender inequality is framed in the context of European welfare state change.

1.2 Contribution to the field

1.2.1 Gender and the welfare state

How can the existing insights of feminist welfare state research be used, and developed, in order to analyze the relationship between gender inequality and the politics of care? In order to tackle this question, I explore representation of gender (in)equality as articulated in the literature on gender and the welfare state.

The theoretical framework of this thesis puts the idea of the women-friendly welfare state in the spotlight. As mentioned in the introduction, comparative feminist welfare studies often, implicitly or explicitly, put forward a certain type of welfare state as normative. The models thought to be more women-friendly are those models where the state extensively assumes responsibility for care provision, such as the “dual breadwinner model” (Lewis 1992), the “Nordic model of social care” (Anttonen 2005), the “earner-carer model” (Sainsbury 1999) and the “caring state” (Daly 2001). Social policy has been conceived as the embodiment of the women-friendliness of welfare states (Kantola and Dahl 2005; Hobson 2004; Anttonen 2002; Sörensen and Bergqvist 2002). And the notion of the women-friendly welfare state has come to refer, to a large extent, to the possibilities of combining employment and care. Within this vein, Nordic welfare states have frequently been represented as the most women-friendly. There is a wide agreement that public care provision has an immense significance for the distribution of women’s time between care and work (Daly and Rake 2003). Public care provision has been considered of disproportionate importance to women because of the gendered division of labour, whereby women do most of the unpaid care and domestic work. Collectively provided services have been important, both in helping women to perform and in relieving them of this work (Daly and Lewis 1999). Mainstream and feminist comparative welfare state research converge around the thesis that in the countries where the state effectively converts the “private” duty of care into a “public” responsibility the conditions for the development of full civil, political and social citizenship for women are better fulfilled (Bussemaker and Kees van Kersbergen 2000).

Feminist welfare state studies have tended to put forward a gender perspective that analyzes women, or compares women and men, as unitary social categories. Mary Daly argues that weaknesses in feminist welfare studies is the almost exclusive focus on women, marginalizing the role of welfare states in constructing systematic differences between women and men (Daly 2000b). Within this vein, the analysis of gender relations must include a male-female comparison (Daly and Rake 2003: 38). So what about differences between women? The understanding of gender analysis as a comparison between women and men presupposes that all women relate in the same way to the state and are affected in a similar manner by state policies. Women stand in contrast to men and, hence, women and men remain stable and homogeneous categories with the result that certain categories are invisibilized in the analysis. This approach does not consider differentiated relations between women and the state, linked to categories such as class, race/ethnicity, sexuality and citizenship/migrant status.

Following from this, comparative gender and welfare state studies often overlook the implications of “intersectionality”. This also means that they overlook the

developments in feminist theory. The theoretical framework of this thesis draws upon critical feminist accounts on gender and the welfare state. These accounts inspire the analysis as they have helped me to elaborate the crucial questions about normative assumptions and silences, which form the basis of the intersectional approach to the welfare state that I develop here. The idea of the women-friendly welfare state rests on a problematic view of women's interests as common and collective and essentially different from the interests of men (Borchorst and Siim 2002). Gender and welfare state research has tended to claim that all women are liberated through the state in the same way, and women are represented as a homogenous category. The idea of the women-friendly welfare state assumes a non-repressive state and privileges social policy as a mechanism to produce equality while it eclipses issues and mechanisms related to civil rights, such as the right to bodily integrity and freedom from gender-related violence (Kantola and Dahl 2005; Kantola 2006). In fact, the Nordic countries have been latecomers in the struggle against men's violence against women (Lister 2009). Gender equality in the Nordic welfare state is frequently associated with equality for white, heterosexual, working mothers (Kantola 2006; Hobson 2004). The women-friendly welfare state is most often linked to equality as sameness and based on the norm of the dual earner model where both women and men are waged workers. Hence, the premise is that women's labour market participation is the key to gender equality (Borchorst and Siim 2002). The association of paid work with emancipation, autonomy, self-realization and choice can be argued to reflect the experience of relatively privileged women. As Drucilla Barker asserts (2005: 2202), paid employment is crucially important to women's well-being, but as feminist scholars we need to reflect upon the sudden convergence of feminist interests with the interests of global capitalism.

I argue that intersectionality speaks also to the assumptions of the "women unfriendly" welfare state. The strong male breadwinner model, associated with the supposedly women-unfriendly Southern European welfare state, also builds upon exclusionary norms. It considers the problem of gender inequality to be mainly a problem of white, middle- or upper-class, heterosexual mothers. The norm of the "male breadwinner" and the "female caretaker" can be understood as an ideal, which primarily corresponds to relatively well-off families. Poor and working-class women have always had to engage in income-generating work in formal and informal labour markets. What is more, public policies have often privileged white, middle-class women encouraging them to be stay-at-home mothers, while refusing migrant and working-class women this support (O'Connor, Orloff and Shaver 1999; Williams 1995).

Definitively, intersectionality contributes to the literature on gender and the welfare state as it questions the women-men binary and the strong focus on women's unpaid care and domestic work. Gender and welfare studies need to take into account the problems of taking a unitary notion of women for granted. Gender (in)equality must be understood as inherently interlocked with inequalities related to categories such as class, race/ethnicity and sexuality. The point of departure here is that the category "women" is, at the same time, normative *and* exclusionary and it is commonly invoked without challenging class or racial privilege (Butler 1990). Gender is not constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts. Following from this, it is impossible to separate gender from the context in which it is produced and maintained. As such, this thesis explores the ways in which gender and gender equality are discursively produced in policy debates

surrounding care and domestic work in the specific contexts of Spain and Sweden. For this purpose I develop the concept of intersectionality as an analytical tool for welfare state analysis.

1.2.2 Global care and the welfare state

In feminist theory care and domestic work have been represented as linked to the problem of gender inequality in different ways. Early feminist work reclaimed unpaid care or domestic labour as “work” and highlighted the sexual division of labour. Debates centred upon the exploitation of women’s unpaid care and domestic work in the home, and the need to increase women’s participation in paid work, on the one hand, and to promote equal sharing of work in the home between women and men, on the other. Other scholars rejected the idea of female caregivers as victims preferring to focus on the meanings of care in women’s lives and experiences. All in all, feminists have often considered care and domestic work as women’s common burden. Nevertheless, researchers have started to emphasize the global divisions among women constituted in care and domestic work. Even so, studies on women’s unpaid care work in the home, as in studies on gender and the welfare state, and women’s paid domestic (care) work, as in the global care chains literature, are seldom informed by each other (Anderson 2000). Addressing this weakness, my empirical analysis combines the examination of unpaid work performed by women for family members (in the debates on reconciliation and dependent care) and paid domestic (care) work (in the debates on domestic service).

Gender has been analyzed as the dominant system of social relations that shape care and domestic work. While feminist researchers have pointed out that the ideology and practice of informal care reinforce the sexual division of labour, these studies tend to articulate the interests and concerns of white, middle-class women, treating divisions of race/ethnicity as structures that only affect “other” women. Domestic service is a generally overlooked issue in welfare state studies, which have centred on women’s unpaid work in the family. Hilary Graham (1991) emphasizes non-kin forms of domestic work and home-based care in order to grasp the intersections of class and race alongside of gender. The focus on women’s unpaid care and domestic work performed in the home for their own families overshadows the work carried out by women of colour for and in white families. The boundaries between private and public become ambiguous when home becomes work, and work becomes home. This critique of welfare state research motivates the inclusion of debates surrounding domestic service as an empirical case study in this thesis, as a critical contrast to the more traditional issues treated within the welfare state literature: policies related to elderly care, childcare and parenting. Domestic service can also be considered a particularly relevant topic to study in order to reveal the shifting boundaries between private and public.

While feminists have often considered care and domestic work as a burden imposed on all women, and feminist welfare studies often focus on women’s unpaid care and domestic work in the family, theories on “global care chains” and the “international transfer of caretaking” have raised questions about different forms of social inequality and divisions among women in the globalized economy of care (Anderson 2000;

Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003; Salazar Parreñas 2001) That care and domestic work encompass categories of gender, class and race/ethnicity is not new, as post-colonial scholars reveal (Lewis 2006), but the phenomenon of global care chains, where cheap migrant labour is demanded by average- and high-income households aspiring to combine employment and family life, reinforces the need for an intersectional approach to social policy (Kvist and Peterson 2010; Lutz 2002). Speaking of women as a homogenous category becomes problematic and it is necessary to move beyond the uniform understanding of the category women (Kvist, Carbin and Harjunen 2009). The insights stemming from the “global care chains” literature have implications for the welfare state analysis I develop as they justify the inclusion of the policy debate on paid domestic (care) work and the adoption of an intersectional analytical approach.

In the literature on global care chains there exist contradictory approaches to domestic service; many emphasize the exploitation of domestic workers and others underline the emancipation, agency and potential empowerment of the migrant women involved (Lutz 2002). I argue that both empowerment and disempowerment can be involved in the process of globalization of care but this has to be studied empirically and cannot be assumed *a priori*. While I recognize the importance of studies that adopt a *bottom-up* perspective focusing on domestic workers’ experiences and strategies, the analysis I develop takes a *top-down* perspective by analyzing dominating state discourses in authoritative policy documents. Public policies can operate as enabling and/or restraining for migrant domestic workers in specific contexts. By exploring public policies, I attempt to reveal the ways in which domestic workers are positioned by dominant policy discourses and scrutinize processes of privileging and exclusion. In focusing upon the migration process and experiences of paid domestic work and not on the (welfare) state, theories on global care chains do not pay sufficient attention to the role of the state in articulating positions, meanings and value of paid domestic care work. This thesis addresses this weakness by studying precisely the role of the state: the empirical analysis I develop explores the ways in which the state, through its public policies, shapes the social organization of care by, for instance, constructing the employment of domestic workers as a viable and legitimate solution to problems like the “reconciliation of work and family life”.

1.2.3 Intersectional welfare state analysis

A feminist analysis of policies surrounding care and domestic work needs to take intersectionality into account for various reasons. Firstly, intersectionality has become central to any understanding of gender through the developments within feminist theory. Secondly, as we have seen, critics have shown that gender and welfare state studies often put forward an exclusionary vision of gender equality defined as equality only for white, heterosexual, working mothers. The criticism of exclusionary norms can be equally applied to the supposedly women-unfriendly welfare state given the underlying norm of white, heterosexual, middle- or upper-class mothers. Thirdly, the literature on global care chains reveals the need to problematize any unitary category of “women” in relation to care and domestic work given the interconnection of gender, race/ethnicity, and class in

the global economy. The aim here is to develop an intersectional approach to feminist welfare state analysis.

Overall, embracing intersectionality has involved placing those who are currently marginalized in the centre. But social categories should not be seen as counting only for the marginalized, the non-privileged “other”; they also count as conditions for the privileged (Staunæs 2003). I find Kimberly Crenshaw’s (1991) concept of political intersectionality useful. It refers to how inequalities and their intersections are relevant at the level of political strategies and policies. Crenshaw shows how both sex discrimination policies and race discrimination policies have tended to marginalize the experiences of black women privileging white women and black men respectively. As Avtar Brah and Ann Phoenix argue (2004), a key feature of feminist analyses of intersectionality is that they are concerned with challenging the normative subject of feminism. The present analysis explores how certain categories of women and men set the norm in gender equality policies; it pays attention to the ways in which specific policies and discourses privilege certain groups of women (and men) over others. This is done by means of an examination of normative assumptions and exclusionary visions articulated in policy discourses. An important aspect to study is the ways the discourses provide certain subject positions at a given time and in a given context (Dahl 2000). Moreover, when the issue of intersecting inequalities is taken into account, differentiated and contradictory effects of policies can be revealed.

Care-related policies can be considered generally empowering for women in terms of enabling them to be mothers of small children and daughters to elderly parents and, at the same time, have paid work. Nevertheless, care-related policies cannot be interpreted as automatically empowering for all women (Kantola and Dahl 2005). My argument is that the welfare state cannot be seen as *a priori* “women-friendly” or “unfriendly”, but in-depth empirical studies can reveal how specific public policies construct gender and gender (in)equality which, in turn, can help us interpret the potential effects on women and men. The principal research question, “how is gender inequality constructed in the politics of care?”, addresses the way in which the state articulates the problem of gender inequality emphasizing that while some representations become dominant other meanings are obscured. The analysis shows how care-related policies that indeed aim to improve gender equality can at the same time marginalize “other” women. Additionally, rather than assuming the existence of a women-(un)friendly welfare state in general terms, I am interested in the ways in which policy debates construct the welfare state as “women-friendly” – or not.

1.3 Design of the research project

1.3.1 Methodological considerations

As a researcher I do not stand outside of representations and, hence, I do not aim to take an objective position, telling the “truth” about what gender (in)equality “really” is (Rönblom 2005) or about what the “best” welfare state type is. Following from this, the

aim of this study is not to objectively test theoretical presuppositions but to use the theoretical framework as a source of inspiration in identifying critical inquiry and developing the analytical tools to scrutinize the empirical material (Dahl 2000). I study discourses on gender (in)equality, not in order to objectively evaluate their success, but to critically scrutinize the problem representations, their underlining normative assumptions and the silences. I recognize that knowledge is always situated (Haraway 1988). As a Swedish woman and feminist living and working in Spain I am aware that I sometimes adhere to some extent to the idea of a women-friendly welfare state as I widely assume that public care provision is “good” and favourable to women. However, this project has given me the opportunity to examine also Swedish politics of care from a critical standpoint. The purpose is to analyze the way in which gender inequality is produced as a policy problem and thus given certain meanings while other meanings are obscured.

Theoretical debates on gender (in)equality inspire my reading of the empirical material. Gender equality has been conceptualized in multiple ways by feminist scholars as well as in public policies. Judith Squires (1999) outlines how feminist analysis has moved from focusing on equality between women and men to revalorizing gender difference and then to emphasizing gender diversity related to categories of class, race/ethnicity and sexuality. Nancy Fraser (1997) reconstructs the history of debates in the feminist movement, identifying a similar shift towards a focus on differences among women and multiple intersecting differences. Western feminist thought has been criticized for constructing the Third World woman as the “other”; as a passive, victimized and homogenized object rather than the subject of agency, in contrast to the modern, educated and liberated western woman (Mohanty 1994). Definitely, white, middle- and upper-class, heterosexual feminism has been widely criticized for hegemonic representations of gender equality. Following from this, it becomes clear that gender equality is not something that just “is” in some unproblematic way, but something that may be understood and packaged in several different ways, each with different consequences (Magnusson, Rönnblom and Silius 2008). Within this vein, the task is to examine how different representations of gender (in)equality are produced and to reflect upon its political consequences.

The social constructivist approach is largely inspired by Carol Bacchi’s *What’s the problem represented to be?* approach (1999). This approach rests on the presumption that there are no objective policy problems and that “truths” are constructed within discourse. Furthermore, discourses have important material and immaterial effects. Competing ideas about what the problem is can be discovered as we ask complementary questions about who is regarded as responsible for the problem, what the causes and effects of the problem are, and what solutions are proposed to solve the problem. Absences in the political agenda are significant for the analysis given that they say something about what is being excluded or marginalized. The way in which people talk about a problem is always only one interpretation among other possibilities. Within this vein, I analyze different representations of gender inequality on the agenda and pay attention to what goes unquestioned, revealing the silences in terms of gender relations, class, sexuality, etc. The approach defines policy as discourse, and discourses can be seen as systems of thoughts composed of ideas, beliefs and practices (Lessa 2006). The analysis is inspired by discourse-oriented analyses which bring to light the relationship between discourse, power and subjects. I argue that, the effects of discourse can be related to the ways in

which subjects are constituted in discourse. Following from this, the analysis pays attention to the ways in which discourses privilege certain subject positions and marginalize others. The process of constructing policy problems is referred to as a framing process, but the focus falls upon underlying normative assumptions rather than seeing discourses as intentionally used by different actors for specific purposes.

The analysis aims to reveal dominating gender discourses. Feminism has often challenged dominant masculine discourses creating spaces for marginal discourses and revealing the ways in which women are positioned as the “other” in dominant discourses which construct the male as the norm. Nevertheless, feminism and feminist research also contribute to the creation of certain realities, while marginalizing others, producing its own dominant discourses. As we have seen, critics have shown that feminist comparative welfare state studies have generated a discourse which is exclusionary given the definition of the problem of gender inequality as a problem for white, heterosexual, working mothers. I also find useful critical analyses towards gender (in)equality that question norms that are often taken for granted, such as economic growth, progress and modernity (Rönblom 2009, Mohammad 2005, Towns 2002). Furthermore, I draw upon Nancy Fraser’s work on gender and the welfare state (1989), which emphasizes underlying normative assumptions of social policies. She sustains that only with a focus on the “politics of need interpretation” can feminists meaningfully intervene in the debates over social spending and the restructuring of the welfare state. The analysis exposes the processes by which welfare policies and practices construct women and women’s needs according to certain contestable interpretations. My policy analysis does not specifically use the concept of “needs” but focuses on the construction of “problems”.

I analyze dominating gender discourses by means of a textual analysis of authoritative official policy documents. The policy texts were selected according to their relevance in articulating gender inequality as a policy problem and in reflecting important policy shifts. As such, the analyzed documents are acts, government bills, parliamentary bills, parliamentary debates, policy plans and policy reports from the period of time between 1995 and 2010. The textual analysis draws upon the Critical Frame Analysis developed within the two European research projects MAQEEQ and QUING¹ in which I have conducted research on gender equality, family policy, care and employment. The starting point of this approach is that there are multiple ways of framing gender inequality as a policy problem and, thus, that there are multiple visions of gender equality embedded in problem representations (Bustelo and Lombardo 2007; Verloo 2005, Verloo and Lombardo 2007; Lombardo et al. 2009).

Building upon the guide to textual analysis (*sensitizing questions*) developed within these research projects, I adapted it to this particular study (see chapter 4 and annex). The textual analysis draws special attention to dimensions of diagnosis and prognosis, gender and intersectionality, location and voice. I emphasize the interconnectedness of problems (diagnosis) and solutions (prognosis) as I see these two dimensions as intimately intertwined; a policy measure can be seen as having an implicit or explicit interpretation of what the problem is, and a problem representation involves ideas about what the feasible solutions might be. However, discourses entail contradictions (Magnusson, Rönblom and Silius 2008) and the textual analysis examines the dimensions separately in order to reveal contradictions within the discourse, between what is considered

¹ See QUING <http://www.quing.eu>; MAGEEQ <http://www.mageeq.net>; www.proyectomageeq.org

problematic and the solutions offered. I herein draw attention to contradictory effects of the welfare state (Kantola and Dahl 2005). The dimensions of gender/intersectionality and voice are linked to the analysis of normative subject positions and exclusion, and the dimension of location is linked to the public and private divide and the shifting boundaries between individual/family responsibility and state responsibility. The analysis of the individual textual analyses identified the dominant discourses surrounding gender (in)equality with attention to normative assumptions and silences.

1.3.2 Contrasting case studies

In this study I will analyze and compare policy debates surrounding care and domestic work in a Southern European welfare state, Spain, and a Northern European welfare state, Sweden, in the period of time between 1995 and 2010. The year 1995 is justified given that this was the date of the United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing which represented a milestone in governments' commitment towards "mainstreaming" gender equality in public policies (Bustelo and Lombardo 2007; Verloo and Lombardo 2007). The year is also motivated in relation to the national contexts; the debates that are analyzed emerged in the mid 1990s, or later.

Feminist welfare state studies have highlighted the differences between welfare states in the Southern and Northern European countries. The Spanish welfare state has been characterized as a strong "male breadwinner" model. Care is a relatively new issue on the political agenda in Spain, but since 1995 it has become widely debated in the context of welfare state (re)construction, particularly in the policies related to the problems of "reconciliation of work and family life" and "care for dependent people". These two policy debates are analyzed in the Spanish case study. Feminist researchers have most often emphasized the "familialistic" character of the Spanish welfare state and, thus, the ways in which the Spanish welfare state attributes a key role to women's unpaid care and domestic work (Threlfall, Cousins and Valiente 2005; Carrasco et al. 1997). At the same time, studies indicate that the expectations on women's unpaid work within the family can no longer sustain the weight placed upon it (Anttonen 2005; Martínez Buján 2005; Stark and Regnér 2002). Spain has moved towards a "dual earner" model in a context of an, until the economic crisis, increasing participation of women in the labour market, an ageing population and new migration patterns. Research indicates that, rather than public care provision, "private" solutions are still dominant, although shifting in character. For instance, some studies emphasize the crucial role of female migrant domestic workers in child and elderly care work (Martínez Buján 2007; Fernández Córdón and Tobío Soler 2005; Tobío 2005). The phenomenon of "global care chains" can be argued to be more significant in Southern European contexts than Nordic ones given that, in the former, public care provision is scarce and private solutions often dominate. The Spanish case study analyzes the issue of "domestic service" as a third debate, indeed a quite marginal policy debate in Spain in spite of the efforts of domestic workers' organizations and the feminist movement to put domestic workers' demands on the political agenda. Importantly, the focus falls upon the period when social policy was developed in the issues of reconciliation and dependent care, until 2008. The study does not analyze the

impact of the overall cuts in social spending in Spain since the beginning of the economic crisis. Future investigations will need to address this development and the implications for the Spanish welfare state.

The Nordic welfare state model has often set the norm for comparative welfare state research while Southern European welfare states have been seen as lagging behind. In Sweden gender equality has been constructed as part of the national identity, wanting to set an example for other countries and the European Union, particularly in issues regarding the combining of work and family life (Towns 2002; Hobson, Lewis, and Siim 2002). The Nordic welfare state has been characterized as a “dual breadwinner” model (Lewis 1992) or “earner-carer” model (Sainsbury 1999), where both women and men are entitled to be carers and earners. The aim has been to enable women to become workers and men to become caregivers. Policies that facilitate the combining of work and family life and provide elderly care have a relatively long history in Sweden. An extensive social policy has been directed at more or less all sections of the population on the basis of citizenship (Bergqvist et al. 1999). These policies include extensive and flexible parental leaves and good availability of public childcare services. Elderly care has also been provided through extensive public care provisions (Szebehely 2005). Domestic service in private households is a much more common practice in Spain than in Sweden, but has been widely debated in Sweden and not Spain. Researchers have linked the expansion of the domestic service market in Sweden since the 1990s to the retrenchment of the welfare state. The policy debate on “domestic service” that I analyze in the Swedish case study emerged in the mid 1990s when the public sector had gone through cutbacks and unemployment was increasing. The debate revolved around the question whether domestic services should be subsidized by the state, and it came to be known as the “maid debate” (*pigdebatten*). It was ideologically charged and caused controversies articulated in parliamentary debates, the media, and civil society (see, for example, Kvist and Peterson 2010; Kvist, Carbin and Harjunen 2009; Platzer 2007; Gavanas 2006; Öberg 2004). A law on tax credits for domestic services was finally adopted in 2007 after the right-wing “Alliance” had formed a government in 2006.

The Swedish debate provides an interesting contrast to the Spanish case study because it turns domestic service, a marginal problem on the agenda in Spain, into a contentious gender (in)equality issue with a prolonged debate in the parliament, engaging governments, political parties, trade unions, feminists and civil society actors. Furthermore, the debate does not only deal with domestic service but it also reveals current representations of the problem of “reconciliation of work and family life” and of elderly care (defined as “dependent care” in Spain), which constitute the other two issues analyzed in the Spanish case. Additionally, it reveals a problem representation which hardly appears in the Spanish context as the debate is crucially about the intersection of gender and class.

The study combines the analysis of traditional welfare state topics with the analysis of an issue that is most often excluded in welfare state research. The issue of “reconciliation of work and family life” focusing on parental leaves, care provision and child allowances and the issue of “care for dependent people” focusing on elderly care have traditionally been framed as central to welfare state analysis. While many feminist welfare state studies choose to analyze parental leaves and childcare or elderly care, this empirical study analyzes these issues together to be able to say something about the

dominating discourses on gender (in)equality and differences between the debates. As a contrast to these traditional objects of welfare state studies, and inspired by the insights of post-colonial theory and global care chains research (Anderson 2000; Lutz 2002; Lewis 2006), I analyze the issue of paid domestic (care) work (“domestic service”). This issue has often been ignored in welfare state studies that focus more on women’s unpaid care and domestic work. The different policy debates analyzed in this study can be seen as part of the (re)construction and legitimation of the welfare state. As such, the discourses are both shaped by and shaping welfare state change. They reveal the continuous negotiation of (welfare) state boundaries and the construction of gender inequality as a related policy problem. The examination of Spanish and Swedish debates surrounding the issues of reconciliation of work and family life, dependent care and domestic service aims to contribute to our understanding of gender and the welfare state.

Given the prevalence of quantitative and positivist comparative research, qualitative and discourse-oriented comparisons have been marginal (Kantola 2006; Rönnblom 2005), not least within comparative gender and welfare state research. Feminist comparative research tends to focus on institutions and policies but not discourses. While comparative studies have been criticized for making comparisons when concepts have different meanings in different contexts, cross-country differences in meanings of gender inequality are here seen as the point of departure. The analysis centres upon different representations of gender inequality in the politics of care. Moreover, this study analyzes different forms of care; childcare, as articulated in the debate on reconciliation of work and family life, elderly care, as articulated in the debate on dependent care, and paid domestic (care) work. In contrast to attempts to formulate a coherent and all-encompassing notion of care (Daly and Lewis 1999; Thomas 1993), I contend that, from the point of view of the analysis of problem representations, discourses surrounding care are multiple, context-related and contradictory.

The contrasting case studies serve to illuminate the problem of gender inequality in the context of European welfare states. I draw upon gender and welfare state regimes to argue that it is interesting to compare Spain and Sweden as they often are taken as representatives of opposite welfare state models in the European context and, as such, representing a women-friendly and a women un-friendly model respectively. Nonetheless, the analysis challenges studies that elaborate typologies and wide generalizations across welfare states and that set a specific type of welfare state as the ideal. A weakness of comparative studies on gender and welfare states is that they often overlook differences within states. An approach that accepts the differentiated nature of the state is helpful since it recognizes diversity and contradictory effects. The analysis is inspired by post-structural feminist approaches to the state, which recognize differences both *within* states and *between* states (Kantola 2006; Kantola and Dahl 2005; Pringle and Watson 2004; Brown 1992). Welfare state change needs to be understood in the light of specific national contexts. Following from this, the research combines in-depth empirical analysis, recognizing the complexity of each case study, with a comparative analysis of the differences and similarities between states: Spain and Sweden. The comparative approach is helpful in revealing both shared normative assumptions and context-related norms and silences (Verloo and Lombardo 2007). It serves to pinpoint both dominant discourses and what is not being problematized in each context. I do not aim to analyze the Spanish case in terms of comparing it with an ideal Nordic model, rather I see the

Swedish case study as providing a useful contrast to highlight dominant normative assumptions and silences in the Spanish agenda, and vice versa.

1.4 Outline

The thesis is structured in seven chapters: two theoretical chapters, the methodological chapter, the two case studies and the comparative analysis.

Chapter 2 – Representations of gender inequality – takes the existence of multiple meanings of gender (in)equality as a point of departure. It highlights the disputes surrounding the different meanings, demonstrating how an understanding of the intersection of categories such as gender, class, race, and sexuality has become imperative in feminist theory as unitary notions of the category women have been challenged. The debates surrounding the concepts of equality, difference and diversity and the feminist strategies of inclusion, reversal and displacement are delineated. These debates are instructive as they reveal different ways of framing the problem of gender inequality and their underlying normative assumptions. The object of study is the politics of care in Spain and Sweden, and so the constructions of gender (in)equality that I examine are not separable from the issue of care and domestic work. The chapter examines the ways in which gender inequality has been interpreted as linked to what has traditionally been constructed as “women’s work”.

Chapter 3 – Beyond the “women-friendly” welfare state – scrutinizes the ways in which gender (in)equality has been conceptualized in relation to the state and, especially, the welfare state. The contributions of feminist welfare state studies are highlighted, particularly the incorporation of unpaid work and care into welfare state analysis. The focus then falls upon the exploration of the normative foundations embedded in comparative gender and welfare state research. I examine the exclusionary norms of the notion of the caring “women-friendly” welfare state and the non-caring “women-unfriendly” welfare state. This critical assessment inspires the reading of the empirical material and motivates the analytical framework scrutinizing gender inequality as a policy problem. I develop an analysis that enables an examination of normative assumptions and exclusion in public policies. This is further motivated by recent studies that show the interconnection between gender and care regimes with migration regimes in the European context. The concept of political intersectionality is developed as an analytical tool for feminist welfare state research.

Chapter 4 – Framing gender inequality as a policy problem – outlines the key considerations of the methodological approach. The analysis of policy problems is inspired by Carol Bacchi’s “*What’s the problem represented to be?*”-approach” (1999; 2009b) which rests upon the presumption that there are no objective policy problems and that “truths” are constructed within discourse. Absences in the political agenda are significant for the analysis, given that they say something about what is being excluded or marginalized. The approach defines policy as discourse, and discourses can be seen as systems of thoughts composed of ideas, beliefs and practices. The effects of discourse can be related to the ways in which subjects are constituted in discourse; the analysis pays attention to the ways in which discourses privilege certain subject positions and

marginalize others. The analysis examines dominating gender discourses by means of an examination of the underlying normative assumptions embedded in discourses on gender inequality. More precisely, I analyze dominating gender discourses by means of a textual analysis, which draws upon the Critical Frame Analysis developed within the European research projects MAGEEQ and QUING. The chapter explains how I build upon the guide to textual analysis developed within the research projects and the ways in which I adapt and redefine it for the purpose of this study. Lastly, the chapter discusses the methodology of comparing the Spanish and the Swedish case studies. The contrasting case studies serve to illuminate the problem of gender inequality in the context of changing European welfare states. The comparative approach is helpful in revealing both shared normative assumptions and context-related norms and silences. It serves to pinpoint both dominant discourses and what is not being problematized in each context.

Chapter 5 – Politics of care in Spain – presents the findings of the Spanish case study, exploring the framing of gender inequality as a policy problem in Spain. The chapter begins with a contextualization of the case study, focusing on the Spanish welfare state and shifting gender relations. Then the analysis of the three policy debates surrounding care and domestic work is presented. The analysis of the debate on the issue of “reconciliation of work and family life” demonstrates the construction of gender inequality as a “working mothers” problem and the ways in which dominating discourses have articulated women’s labour market participation as the key to gender equality. This vision of gender equality is based on the negation of class. Further, this representation converges with the centrality of employment and economic growth in the gender equality discourse. The analysis of “dependent care” shows how this issue has been much more disconnected from the problem of gender inequality and the representation of care work as women’s work has hardly been questioned here. While the developments regarding elderly care have involved creating new rights to receive care, the debate has marginalized care workers and issues of caregivers’ rights and recognition. The examination of the marginal issue on the agenda, “domestic service”, shows how domestic (care) workers have been the invisible “other” in Spanish gender equality policies. The privileging of the problem of reconciliation of work and family life, middle-class families’ interests, economic growth and employment has marginalized domestic workers as subjects. The recent reform of the Special Regime for Domestic Workers proposed by the government may reinforce domestic service as a question of workers’ rights, but not as a question of gender equality.

Chapter 6 – Politics of care in Sweden – presents the findings of the Swedish case study, analyzing the framing of gender inequality as a policy problem in Sweden. The chapter begins with a contextualization of the case study, focusing on the development of the Swedish welfare state and its impact on gender relations. Then the analysis of the policy debate surrounding “domestic service” is presented. Domestic service, a marginal problem on the agenda in Spain, has turned into a contentious gender (in)equality issue with a prolonged debate in the parliament. The analysis shows how structural gender, class and racial/ethnic divisions have been emphasized by the left-wing parties. In contrast, female emancipation has been based on the negation of class in the discourse of the right-wing parties. The analysis of the so-called “maid-debate” allows for an examination of the problem of “reconciliation of work and family life” and of elderly care (defined as “dependent care” in Spain), constructed as closely interrelated with the

issue of domestic service. The Swedish policy debate has framed the problem of reconciling work and family life as a central gender inequality problem, with an emphasis on women's participation in the labour market as the key to gender equality. Gender equality has been articulated within a dominant discourse on economic growth, employment and work ethics. The boundaries of the welfare state have been negotiated particularly in the issue of elderly care and the debate has focused on the tensions between universal rights and subsidized domestic service for elderly. The welfare state has been legitimized by left wing parties on the basis of its women-friendliness, linked with the norms of universal rights and extensive social policy. In contrast, there has been a strong emphasis on freedom of choice among right wing parties, linked to restructurings of the welfare state and private and market solutions.

Chapter 7 – Comparative perspectives – analyzes the Spanish and Swedish case studies from a comparative viewpoint. This concluding chapter explores shared normative assumptions as well as national differences and silences on the agenda. The comparative analysis draws attention to three aspects of the case studies: a) the dominating discourse, shared across Spain and Sweden, surrounding the “reconciliation of work and family life” with the normative assumption of women's labour market participation as the key to gender equality, b) the national differences in articulating “domestic service” as a policy problem, a salient gender equality issue on the Swedish political agenda and a marginal issue in Spain, and c) the shifting representations and (de)legitimation of the welfare state, contrasting the discourse on the women-friendly welfare state and the discourse on freedom of choice. I bring the thesis to a close by turning back to the theoretical discussion regarding the challenges to the notion of the women friendly welfare state and the analytical approach adopted in this thesis. My argument is that the welfare state cannot be seen as *a priori* “women-friendly” or “unfriendly”, but in-depth empirical studies can reveal how specific public policies construct gender and gender (in)equality, which can help us interpret potential effects. Whereas comparative gender and welfare studies often ignore the ways in which policies privilege some women and men over others, this analysis focuses on dominating discourses, normative assumptions and silences in the agenda. Finally, I draw up some questions and avenues for future research.

2 Representations of gender (in)equality

This study takes the existence of multiple meanings of gender and gender (in)equality as a point of departure. In this chapter I will highlight the disputes surrounding the different meanings, focusing on the concepts of gender, equality and care.

Firstly, I focus on the development of the concept of gender, demonstrating how an understanding of the intersection of categories such as gender, class, race, and sexuality has become imperative in feminist theory as unitary notions of the category women have been challenged. Secondly, I turn to the debates surrounding the concepts of equality and difference and the feminist strategies of inclusion, reversal and displacement. These debates are instructive as they reveal different ways of framing the problem of gender inequality. Thirdly, I will examine more in depth how gender inequality has been interpreted as linked to what has traditionally been constructed as women's work: care and domestic work. The object of study is precisely politics of care in Spain and Sweden, and so the constructions of gender (in)equality that I examine in this study are not separable from the issue of care and domestic work. This means that the representation of gender inequality as a policy problem would be very different if I studied, for instance, gendered violence².

While this chapter focuses on the meanings of gender and gender (in)equality in feminist theory, the next chapter focuses on politics and public policies, and the relationship between gender (in)equality and the welfare state. These two chapters are linked in the sense that an understanding of the different approaches to gender and gender (in)equality articulated in feminist theory is necessary in order to better understand the relationship between gender and the welfare state. Feminist theorists have deconstructed the category of women drawing upon antiracist, post-colonial and queer theory, trying to go beyond the equality vs. difference debate and advocating politics of diversity. At the level of political practice, however, women are still assumed as the subject of gender equality policies. Hence, when theory is linked to politics and policy, the category women appears as problematic and necessary at the same time.

I argue that, depending on the way in which gender and gender inequality are articulated, state discourses can have different effects on women (and men), and can be both empowering and/or disempowering. Therefore, it is important to analyze whether public policies construct gender as, for instance, biological sex, a social construction, the bases for a common oppression, or as linked to other categories such as class, race and sexuality. Additionally, it becomes critical to analyze whether policy problems and solutions are constructed with a focus on equality or difference, or with the aim of "going beyond gender", recognizing diversity.

² Gendered violence has been conceptualized as related to gender inequality but then the problem is represented in very different terms than in the debates regarding the reconciliation of work and family life. For an in-depth analysis of the representations of the problem of gendered violence in Spain, see López 2011 and Bustelo, López and Platero 2007. For an analysis of discourses surrounding gendered violence and the emergence of "honour-related violence" on the Swedish agenda, see Carbin 2008.

2.1 Gender and intersectionality

Gender is a contested concept which has been conceptualized in many different ways by feminist scholars and by feminist movements. The divergences in defining the concept can be understood in the light of the existence of multiple feminisms. This brief review of some of the developments in theorizing gender serves as a theoretical backdrop to the analysis of representations of gender inequality as a policy problem.

Given that I will use intersectionality as an analytical tool in the examination of gender inequality as a policy problem (see also chapter 3 and 4), I wish to highlight here the crucial challenges to the idea of women as a unified and homogeneous category and the importance that the concept of intersectionality has acquired. In the following sections I will, hence, discuss the shifts, within feminist theory, from the emphasis on a common oppression towards a questioning of the unitary category of women and the development of the concept of intersectionality. The study focuses on the construction of gender and gender inequality; at the same time, I recognize that categories such as class, race/ethnicity, and sexuality shape and constitute gender and women. I outline the ideas that provide the basis for the intersectional analysis in this work.

My approach draws upon the idea of gender as a discursive construct which cannot be understood without attention to the context in which it is produced and maintained. As such, the category “women” is normative and exclusionary and therefore it is important to study the ways in which discourses, at a given time and in a given context, provide certain gendered subject positions while excluding other possible ones. Embracing intersectionality has involved placing those who are currently marginalized in the centre. But social categories should not be seen as counting only for the marginalized, the non-privileged “Other”; they also count as conditions for the more privileged. Consequently, the analysis I develop pays attention to the ways in which the politics of care privilege certain groups of women (and men) over others.

2.1.1 A common oppression

Gender has been used in feminist studies since the 1970s, but the idea that differences between women and men are not completely determined by biology was emphasized already in the 1940s by Simone de Beauvoir as she argued that “one is not born a woman but becomes one”. Marxist and radical feminists have defended the idea that gender difference is a social construction emerging from the sexual division of labour. Taking women and men’s equal nature as a point of departure, “equality feminists” have seen this difference as a prejudice that needs to be rejected, whereas “difference feminists” have rather seen gender difference as a reflection of women and men’s essentially different nature (Casado 1999).

“Difference feminists” have represented gender difference as related to women’s specific access to knowledge. Women’s privileged access to knowledge is then based upon the idea of a common patriarchal oppression and a universal sexual division of

labour. Feminist theorists have developed a standpoint³ theory which criticizes the male-dominated science and culture and argues in favour of alternative ways of knowing: a feminist epistemology. This feminist epistemology has aimed at the revalorization of the feminine by privileging women's as opposed to men's experiences and thereby creating an alternative way of knowing (Stoltz 2000: 42). Nancy Chodorow's work, influenced by psychoanalysis, argues that mothering is a central constituting element in the social organization and reproduction of gender. From this perspective, the suggestion is to revalorize a unified feminine identity (Chodorow 1978, in Clough 1994: 44). Marxist political theorist Nancy Hartsock (1987) draws upon Chodorow's accounts as she argues that the different psychic experiences of women and men are informed by the differing patterns of male and female activity required by the sexual division of labour. The sexual division of labour makes available to women a view of the "real" social relations that is unavailable to men insofar as they, intentionally or unintentionally, benefit from the exploitation of women. The sexual divisions of labour in housework, in childcare, in waged labour have to change in order to achieve women's emancipation. Women's experiences are considered similar, and a central assumption is that the private/public divide has extended into women's and men's knowledge. Men's standpoint is partial and a feminist standpoint, derived from the experiences of the dominated, can reveal the falseness of men's view of reality (Stoltz 2000: 45; Clough 1994: 67-9).

Feminist standpoint theory has been widely criticized for essentializing the category of women. A problem is how to argue for prioritizing one form of difference, gender difference, as more significant than other differences. Does the idea of a single experience and voice of women not subordinate other forms of difference and repress diversity of voices among women (Squires 1999: 134)? In this account, gender is the only relevant category of difference. Nonetheless, women can embrace identities as white or black women, upper-class or working-class women, heterosexual or lesbian, etc., but such differences between women have been made invisible in feminist standpoint epistemology (Harding 1986). Critics have put forward that the standpoint theory offers too monolithic accounts of gender and falsely universalized accounts of the acquisition of gendered identity, focused on experiences of white, middle-class, Western women. Therefore, it has been referred to as white, middle-class feminism (Clough 1994: 82-3).

In *Black Feminist Thought* sociologist Patricia Hill Collins (2000) formulates a black feminist standpoint theory in reaction to the feminist standpoint epistemology developed by Nancy Hartsock. She argues that black women's political and economic status provides them with a distinctive set of experiences and a different view on reality. Hill Collins argues that the category of women constructed in white feminist theory uncritically depends on ideologies of race and class. The particular knowledge gained at intersecting oppressions of race, class and gender provides the motivation to construct and pass on the subjugated knowledge of black feminist thought. The notion of the separate spheres of private and public, a primary assumption of a feminist standpoint theory, is criticized for the way it shapes differences among women. The assumption of

³ The concept of the feminist standpoint comes from the Marxist notion of the standpoint of the proletariat. The Marxists notion of standpoint implies a claim that the oppressed have a clearer view of "truth" than their oppressor because they lack blinders created by the dominant group's ideology. For a more thorough discussion on the strengths and weaknesses of the feminist standpoint theory see, for example, Clough 1994 and Brown 1995.

the separation of private and public spheres is characteristic of the lives of middle- and upper-class white women. Black women's different experience in relation to the domestic sphere refers to black women's performance of domestic work in white families. In Hill Collins view, the experience of black women's care and domestic work in white households provides the bases for a specific black feminist standpoint (2000: 8-13). This standpoint theory acknowledges partial ways of knowing but, at the same time, Hill Collins privileges the experience of the oppressed as more believable and credible (Clough 1994: 87-9, 103).

We return, however, to the problems of a "women's standpoint". As political scientist Wendy Brown argues, there is a problematic normative base in feminist standpoint theory revealed by white women who cannot locate themselves in Hartsock's accounts of women's experience, and black women who do not identify with Hill Collins' account of black women's way of knowing. There is a tension between adhering to a social constructivist theory, on the one hand, and epistemologically privileging oppressed women's accounts of social life, on the other. The latter implies suspending recognition that women's experience is constructed, historically and culturally, and interpreted. While women are socially constructed, women's words are at the same time represented as truth, and constitute the foundations of feminist knowledge (Brown 1995: 41-2, 48). In line with this criticism, the social constructivist approach adopted in this study implies avoiding truth claims such as claiming to know what gender "really" is or what "real" gender oppression is. The task is to explore and critically analyze the different representations of gender inequality that are produced. The essentialist view of the category women articulated within the feminist epistemology has been widely debated and criticized. This will be discussed next.

2.1.2 Challenging women as a unified category

The above notion of gender difference has been extensively criticized by feminist scholars who highlight the intersection of gender with other structures and categories. The category of women has provoked many controversies, especially in relation to the idea of a relatively coherent notion of women as a crucial element for feminist politics. The differences between women have been the focus of many feminist debates, a question that was raised by black women, lesbians and women of working-class backgrounds (Nicholson 2002: 54). bell hooks draws attention to the racist assumptions that take on white women as the norm, as well as to the sexist assumptions that produce black men as the norm. In *Ain't I a woman* she notes that in much of the literature written by white women on the "woman question" from the nineteenth century to the present day the writers refer to "white men", but only use the word "women" when they really mean "white women". Concurrently, the term "blacks" is often synonymous with black men (hooks 1981).

Black feminism, feminist post-colonial theory, queer theory and post-structuralism have contributed to the questioning of women as a unified category (Brah and Phoenix 2004: 82). Important insights highlight that the social categories of gender, class, race/ethnicity and sexuality are mutually constitutive, interrelated and multifaceted and

that gender relations always need contextualizing (Brah and Phoenix 2004; Carbin and Tornhill 2004; Yuval Davis 1997; Williams 1995). The categories of gender, class, race/ethnicity and sexuality are interlocked in such a way that they should not be seen as additive; they cannot be added up mechanically because particular intersections involved produce specific effects. Each division presents ideological and organizational principles within which the others operate, and their role will differ in different historical contexts (Anthias and Yuval Davis 1983: 68). Although connected to different ontological bases and separate discourses, gender, class, race/ethnicity and sexuality overlap and are articulated by each other in concrete social relations. For that reason, it is problematic to think about gender relations without contextualizing them (Yuval Davis 1997: 7-8). There can be no unitary category of women since the subordination of women to men operates in many different ways in different contexts, and some women as well as men participate in the process of subordinating and exploiting others (Anthias and Yuval Davis 1983: 71). So, while scholars have argued that the emphasis on differences obstructs agency and the mobilizing of sisterhood, the idea of sisterhood has been criticized for being based on the assumption that women share a common oppression. Racist, Eurocentric and middle/upper-class biases have shaped feminist agendas (Yuval Davis 1994: 187). At the same time, black feminism is, for instance, not immune to the contradictions created by its internal heterogeneity along the lines of class and sexuality (Brah and Phoenix 2004: 79).

Unified notions of gender have been challenged by post-colonial theory. In *Under Western Eyes*, Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1994) argues that while feminist scholars have criticized the idea of objectivity and universalism in the male-dominated science, feminist thought has also been involved in hegemonic representation and marginalization, constructing poor women of colour as the “Other”. Her analysis points out the ways in which Western feminist writings have suppressed the heterogeneities of the lives of women in the Third World and thereby produced a singular “Third-World woman”. The assumption of women as an already constituted and coherent group with identical interests and desires regardless of class, ethnic or racial location, implies a notion of gender which can be applied universally and cross-culturally. At the same time, a homogeneous notion of oppression produces an image of an average “Third-World woman”. This Third-World woman is represented as ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domesticated, family-oriented, victimized and sexually constrained. In contrast, Western women’s self-representation involves an image of themselves as educated, modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities and the freedom to make their own decisions. Such divisions between “us” and “them” are based on the privileging of a particular group of women as the norm (1994: 196-200). Following from this, Mohanty argues, Western feminist researchers need to examine their own position within global economic and political hierarchies.

Studies on “intersectionality” have explored the theoretical and practical implications of difference and of challenging unified notions of women⁴. The concept of intersectionality was coined by Kimberly Crenshaw (1989), dedicated to legal studies with a feminist and critical race perspective. In her black feminist critique of feminist theory and antiracist politics she argues that the intersectional experience of black women

⁴ See Weldon 2008, Hancock 2007; Yuval Davis 2006; McCall 2005; de los Reyes and Mulinari 2005, Brah and Phoenix 2004; Carbin and Tornhill 2004; Crenshaw 1989, 1991.

is greater than the sum of racism and sexism and that any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which black women are subordinated. She shows how the paradigm of sex discrimination has tended to be based on the experiences of white women and the model of race discrimination has been based on the experiences of more privileged black men. By embracing intersectionality, and by placing those who are currently marginalized in the centre, Crenshaw argues that feminist theory can be fruitfully expanded.

I think it is important to emphasize that social categories should not be seen as counting only for the marginalized; the non-privileged “Other”. They also count as conditions for the more privileged and powerful (Staunæs 2003). Thus, it is important to analyze how white, heterosexual, middle- and upper-class men and women become the norm in specific policies and discourses – in this case, in the politics of care. An important aspect to study is the ways in which discourses provide certain gendered subject positions at a given time and in a given context (Dahl 2000: 72). The concept of intersectionality emphasizes that different dimensions in social life cannot be separated out into discrete and pure strands and, hence, gender cannot be seen as separated from class and racial/ethnic divisions (Brah and Phoenix 2004: 76). In other words, the experience of a woman is not separable from her class, race/ethnicity and sexuality. From this perspective, there can be no abstract privileging of gender over categories such as class or race/ethnicity, but as a researcher I choose my perspective: the object of study is the phenomenon of gender inequality. At the same time, I recognize that categories such as class, race/ethnicity, and sexuality as well as categories such as nation, citizenship, (dis)ability, age and religion shape and constitute gender and women. An analysis that sees gender as a discursive construct is helpful for developing an intersectional approach. Next, I will focus on these ideas.

2.1.3 Gender and sex as discursive constructions

While feminist theory has moved from talking about “woman” to talk about “women”, discursive accounts of gender challenge the idea that even “women” exist as a stable category. There has been a certain “linguistic turn” within gender theorizing, shifting the attention from material to discursive structures and power relations. I adhere to this approach in that it insists on the discursive construction of meanings of gender and the non-natural and non-essentialist nature of gender (and sex).

The sex/gender distinction, introduced in the 1970s, was developed to avoid biological determinism which focuses on the category of sex⁵. This distinction, which defines sex as biologically determined and gender as socially constructed, has been central to a significant body of gender theory. Distinguishing sex from gender was expected to erode the social construction of gendered identities while accepting sexual difference. Liberal feminism in particular has promoted the idea that sex should become

⁵ For an account of the sex/gender system, see Rubin 1975. The cultural anthropologist Gayle Rubin used the sex/gender system to challenge the idea of biology as destiny. She has showed that “sexual roles” vary widely cross-culturally. Her sex/gender distinction conceptualizes gender, not as determined by sex, but as a product of socialization.

politically irrelevant; regardless of their sex, women and men are equally capable to achieve the “rational” and individualistic traits often believed to be masculine (Squires 1999: 55).

Nevertheless, the causal connection between sex and gender has been questioned. Theories on the social construction of gender often take sex as foundational assuming a stable category of sex upon which gendered identities are constructed and assuming a causal connection between sex and gender. Many theorists claim that this sex-gender binary is not sustainable given that sex itself is socially constructed in scientific discourses. Philosopher and biologist Donna Haraway (1991) challenges the idea of sexual difference as natural by arguing that “being female” is constructed in contested sexual scientific discourses. Consequently, the distinction between sex and gender gets unclear and the notion of sex as pre-social is rejected. Thus, gender can be understood as linguistic and discursive rather than material, and categories of femininity and masculinity can be defined, not with reference to sex, but to each other. As such, femininity has no ontological foundation, but is relational and contextual. A central task, then, is to explore the construction of femininity as the “Other” of masculinity (Squires 1999: 59-60).

In her influential work *Gender trouble* (1990) philosopher and queer theorist Judith Butler refutes a stable subject of feminism, understood as the seamless category of women, underlining that feminism encounters a problem in assuming that the term “women” denotes a common identity. She emphasizes that the category “women” is normative and exclusionary and that it is invoked with the dimensions of class and racial privilege intact. Gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts and gender intersects with racial, class, and sexual modalities and discursively constituted identities. It becomes impossible to separate gender from the political and cultural intersections in which it is produced and maintained. The insistence upon the unity of the category women ignores the multiplicity of cultural, social and political intersections in which the concrete array of “women” is constructed (1990: 4-5, 19). Butler’s theory disrupts the casual thinking between sex as a biological fact and gender as socially constructed and sustains that femininity and masculinity have no stable references to biology and so there is no reason to assume two genders. She rejects the presumption of a binary gender system that holds on to the belief in a relation between gender and sex where gender reflects sex. Butler also criticizes the notion of gender that presupposes a causal relation between sex, gender and desire. The unity of sex, gender and desire is assumed to be expressed in the desire for an opposite gender, in the form of an oppositional heterosexuality (ibid. 31). On the sex/gender distinction Butler writes: “The presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it. When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically interdependent on sex, gender itself becomes a free floating artifice, with the consequence that man and masculine might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and woman and feminine a male body as easily as a female one” (ibid. 9). In other words, gender is not to be understood simply as the cultural inscription of meaning on a pre-given sex. “Natural facts” of sex are rather seen as historically produced discursive formations. Therefore gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which a “natural sex” is produced and established as pre-discursive, prior to culture (ibid. 10). When the culture

that constructs gender is understood in terms of universal laws, then it seems that gender is as determined and fixed as it was under the biology-is-destiny formulation. Culture, not biology, becomes destiny.

In contrast, unless there is a separation between the discourse of sex and that of gender, biology will inevitably be constructed as destiny in that society, as pointed out by Nira Yuval-Davis (1997: 9). I agree with her as she contends that in linguistic contexts where there is no word for “gender”, only “sex”, it can be necessary to invent such a word.

The intersectional analysis that I adopt builds upon Butler’s idea of the category “women” as both normative and exclusionary. There can be no pre-given unitary subject of women already there to be oppressed. Following from this, as political scientist Chantal Mouffe (1983) argues, the most interesting path for feminist theory is to study the ways in which women’s subordination is constructed in different discourses. But Mouffe also highlights that it would be absurd to struggle only for the elimination of subordination of women without trying to abolish other forms of domination produced by, for instance, racism and capitalism.

To say that a category such as gender or race is socially constructed is not to say that that category has no significance in our world. It is necessary to highlight that considering gender as discursively constructed does not mean that it has no material effects on people’s lives. Gender, class and race/ethnicity can be seen as fictions in the sense that they are not pre-social, but sexism, racism and capitalism have crucial material effects (Kantola 2006: 26). Categories have meanings and consequences (Crenshaw 1991: 1296-7). An important project is to analyze the ways the discourses provide certain subject positions at a given time and in a given context and examine the ways in which power has clustered around certain categories and not others.

2.2 Equality versus difference debates

I will now focus on the debates surrounding the concepts of equality, difference and diversity and the feminist strategies of inclusion, reversal and displacement. For this I draw upon Nancy Fraser’s and Judith Squires’ works which demonstrate the shifts in feminist theory and feminist movements, as well as the criticisms and problems inherent to the different perspectives.

Feminist analysis has moved from focusing on equality between women and men to highlighting gender difference and then to emphasizing multiple intersecting differences and diversity. This shift follows the lines that I have already exposed above, going from assumptions of a common oppression towards questioning the understanding of women as a uniform and stable category. Seen from a chronological perspective, the shift from equality to difference, towards the dissolution of the dichotomy has been depicted as linked to the different stages or waves in feminism (Fraser 1997). But, as Robyn Wiegman (2000) rightfully points out, the history of feminism can be written in many different ways, which means we need to be aware that the narrative of feminism in three waves is one -grand- story among other possible stories. Also, as Judith Squires

underlines, the debates on equality, difference and diversity can be seen as an ongoing and unresolved debate (Squires 1999: 116).

The debates presented in the following sections are useful for the analysis since they reveal different ways of framing the problem of gender inequality. They help me to identify the dominant representations of gender (in)equality and to adopt a critical analysis of such representations. I argue that it is essential to analyze whether policy problems and solutions are constructed with a focus on equality or difference or diversity because, depending on the way in which “gender inequality” is articulated as a policy problem, such policies can have different effects on women and men and different groups of women.

The aim is not to evaluate which strategy is the “best” one; rather I attempt to critically scrutinize the dominant representations of gender inequality produced within discourse, with a focus on normative assumptions and exclusion. At the same time, it should be recognized that intersectionality, the concept that I use as an analytical tool, questions any unitary conceptions of the category women. In line with the strategy of displacement, the analysis challenges the man/women binary, revealing the ways in which the discourse tends to privilege inequalities produced by gender. In that sense, the approach could be said to come closer to a diversity perspective than the equality and difference perspectives.

2.2.1 Equality, difference and diversity

Nancy Fraser (1997), an American feminist and philosopher, broadly outlines the developments of feminist debates to show how the focus of the debates of the feminist movement, in the context of the United States, has shifted throughout history.

In the first phase, from the late 1960s to mid 1980s, the main focus was on the tension between gender equality and difference. Liberal “equality feminists” saw gender difference as an instrument of male dominance in the sense that “difference” rationalized women’s subordination. From this perspective, gender difference appeared to be inseparable from sexism and, therefore, the vision of liberal feminists was to minimize this difference. This view was contested by the rise of a kind of “difference” feminism. From this perspective, equality between women and men was rejected as andocentric and assimilationist. Rather than challenging sexism, equality feminism actually reproduced it by devaluating femininity. A new interpretation of gender difference emphasized that women did differ from men but this did not mean inferiority. The way to do justice to women was to recognize, not minimize, gender difference and to make women’s voice and perspective heard. Thus, Fraser shows how both sides had convincing criticisms of the other; the difference feminism showed that egalitarians presupposed the male as the norm, which implied a disadvantage to women. The egalitarians argued that the difference perspective relied on stereotypical notions of femininity which reinforced existing gender hierarchies (Fraser 1997: 176-7).

In the second phase, from the mid 1980s to early 1990s, the focus on gender difference gave way to the focus on differences among women. Feminist currents came to argue that gender difference could not be fruitfully discussed in isolation from other

divisions, especially race/ethnicity, sexuality and class. This tendency was mainly a result of the mobilization and intervention of lesbians and black women. Black women criticized the implicit reference to white Anglo-Saxon women in mainstream feminist texts, and lesbians revealed the assumption of normative heterosexuality in the classic feminist accounts on mothering, sexuality, gender identity and reproduction. While mainstream feminism had privileged the standpoint of white, heterosexual women, the new perspectives revealed that the women's movement itself reproduced racism, heterosexism and class hierarchies. The gender difference perspective was strongly criticized for promoting universal accounts of feminine gender identity. "Women's voice" implied stereotypical and normative accounts of middle-class, heterosexual, white European femininity. Also the equality feminism was criticized for assuming that all women are subordinated to all men in the same way and degree (Fraser 1997: 178). The universalizations of some women's situations and some women's identity had not created feminist solidarity and hence the need for a reorientation was apparent.

In the 1990s the debate shifted from differences among women to a focus on multiple intersecting differences. Instead of focusing on women, the attention would fall on how gender intersects with other categories of subordination. All struggles against subordination would be linked to feminism and gender would be theorized in connection to race/ethnicity, class, sexuality and nationality (Fraser 1997: 180).

Political scientist Judith Squires' (1999) makes an overview of the development of the gender concept in feminist theory. As she distinguishes between three analytically different feminist political strategies, "inclusion", "reversal" and "displacement", her account coincides with Fraser's depiction of shifts in the feminist movement.

The equality/difference debate was in the centre of attention in feminist theorizing in the 1980s and 90s. Equality and difference came to represent competing perspectives in feminist theory. The equality approach, linked to the strategy of inclusion, means that gender should become politically irrelevant. The aim is to transcend the sexist assumptions that have worked to discriminate women, to give women and men equal rights and enable women to participate in the public sphere equally with men. Gender difference is regarded as a manifestation of sexism, and existing gender characteristics as socially constructed in a sexist society to the advantage of men and disadvantage of women. The idea that women are different has been used to exclude them from the public sphere and, consequently, gender difference is rejected in the name of a more inclusive and just society. Equality theorists accept the basic idea of liberal political theory that equality should mean neutrality towards gender. The aim is equality and, hence, if achieved, gender would become an insignificant category. This gender neutrality perspective affirms that women as individuals should be entitled to full human rights. The emphasis lies not on equality of outcome but on equal opportunity. Women and men should be subject to the same procedural rules and formal evaluations so that they can equally chose the goals to pursue. Difference is not denied but individuals are seen as autonomous to chose and pursue their own projects (1999: 116-120).

The difference approach, linked to the strategy of reversal, emphasizes gender differences. Men and women are different but this should not be interpreted as women are inferior to men. This approach seeks to reverse the order of things by placing what has been marginalized in the centre and privileging what has been subordinated. The aim is to weaken the power of masculine domination, replacing the male-dominated thinking

with a discourse that privileges women's experiences. Women's common identity is celebrated and women's distinctive voice is emphasized. This approach is intertwined with the creation of feminist standpoint epistemology discussed earlier. An inclusive society should recognize women's specificity and embody female and (or instead of) male values. The aim is not to transcend gender traits but to revalorize the feminine against the masculine. The ideal of neutrality is seen as partial and andocentric; the equality perspective implies partiality since it aims to treat people as equals only in respect to masculine needs and capacities (ibid. 118-120).

The strategy of displacement characterizes much of current feminist theorizing and the approach is frequently labelled as post-structuralist. The focus lies on exploring the ways in which dominating discourses constitute the category of gender and, hence, the analysis that I develop draws upon this framework. As in Judith Butlers work, this strategy destabilizes sex/gender distinction, challenging the idea that gender needs to be thought of as cultural elaboration of the sexes. Feminist theorists have also embraced the task of deconstructing the binary opposition of equality and difference. The binary of equality/difference has been undermined by both identity politics and by deconstructive theoretical perspectives. On the one hand, as in Fraser's view, binary thinking has been challenged through political activism. Identity politics, particularly the mobilization of lesbians and black women, have undermined the relevance of the equality/difference debate (Fraser 1997: 101). The idea of a unified women's voice and identity was diluted by women who found themselves silenced and excluded within the women's movement dominated by white, heterosexual, middle-class Western women. On the other hand, as Squires emphasizes, the deconstruction of dichotomies like equality/difference reveals how each side of the binary implies and reflects the other (Squires 1999: 126-7).

The analysis that I adopt also builds upon these ideas. It reveals how inequalities produced by gender and the man/women binary are privileged within discourse. The attempt to go beyond binary thinking will be discussed further in the following sections.

2.2.2 Beyond binary thinking

The policies that I will analyze are often characterized as "equality" policies. It is therefore important to be aware of the problems embedded in this concept. When equality and difference are paired dichotomously, they seem to structure an impossible choice. Joan Scott (1988) argues that the debate has created a binary opposition to offer a choice to feminists between endorsing equality, or its presumed antithesis -difference. If one opts for equality, one has to accept the notion that difference is antithetical to it. If one opts for difference, one has to admit that equality is unreachable. The opposition hides the interdependence of the two terms: equality is not the elimination of difference and difference does not rule out equality (Scott 1988: 38). Both the equality and the difference perspective often assume that one must be the same as, or different from, a particular ideal -male- type. Equality is commonly seen as sameness, but the notion of equality depends on an acknowledgement of the existence of difference. If individuals or groups were the same, there would be no need to ask for equality. Scott emphasizes that equality requires the recognition and inclusion of differences (Scott 1988: 43-4).

The construction of equality as sameness has been challenged. As pointed out by Wendy Brown (1995), the definition of equality as a condition of sameness, where all humans share the same nature and rights, is intrinsic to liberalism. While equality is understood as sameness, gender emerges as a problem of difference, and human sameness contrasts with gender difference. Equality as sameness secures gender privilege through naming women as different and men as the “neutral” norm of the same. The sameness of men requires the difference of women, just as whiteness requires people of colour and heterosexuality requires homosexuality. The conceptual opposite of equality is not inequality but difference. Whereas inequality is the problem to which equality is the solution; difference is the problem to which equality as sameness is an impossible solution. Thus, equality as sameness makes difference a problem for women and other “Others” (1995: 128, 153-4).

Anna Maria Holli (1997) adopts a more positive view of the concept of equality as she puts forward that equality can change in meanings in ways that favour women’s interest; the concept can be re-conceptualized and used by women in more innovative and “women-friendly” ways. Hence, equality can be a continuum where both difference and similarity are present. Undeniably, when equality means sameness with men, women are rendered invisible, and equality connotes an assimilation of women into a male norm, whereas difference is represented as deviations from the male norm (Holli 1997: 137-8). But Holli argues that the notion of equality can shift towards recognition of differences (ibid. 152-6): “The relativist standpoint leads us to consider equality as being in a state of continuous flux. This argument is corroborated by empirical research, the results of which indicate the coexistence of several different conceptualizations of equality and a struggle between them” (ibid. 158). In line with this argument, I use the concept of equality as the point of departure in the analysis, but I am interested in the shifting meanings articulated in the context of politics of care, where equality, difference and diversity can all be present in the discourses.

Taking the strategy of displacement and the concept of diversity as point of departure, gender theorists have argued that gender policies should be rooted in a strategy that goes “beyond gender”, displacing patriarchal gender differences and deconstructing discursive regimes that engender the subject. From this perspective, policies should be linked to the concept of intersectionality⁶ (Verloo 2005). A diversity perspective entails seeing not only differences between women and men but also the way these work to repress differences within these groups (Scott 1988). As the diversity perspective focuses not only on differences between but also on the differences within groups, it displaces the binary opposition between men and women, equality and difference. While the difference perspective is concerned with making politics reflect authentic identities, the diversity perspective aims to reveal how all notions of identity themselves are constructed.

Post-structural accounts of gender, however, have received criticism from sceptical feminists who consider it dangerous to see the categories of women and men as variable social constructs lacking coherence and stability, on the grounds that a common identity is necessary for women’s mobilization (Kantola 2006:13-4). Some feminists have even expressed apocalyptic views on feminism’s future, considering that the theoretical,

⁶ Scholars have analyzed the challenges involved in adopting policies that take intersectionality into account. See, for instance, the following studies on the institutionalization of intersectionality in different European countries and the EU: Bustelo 2009, Kantola and Nousiainen 2009, Lombardo and Verloo 2009.

identitarian and generational differences have come to interrupt feminism. Such apocalyptic perspectives assume that feminism once upon a time was on the right track and has now lost its way due to the fragmentation of the collective and the challenge to universal sisterhood. The end of feminism has been regarded as caused by post-structuralism and the deconstruction of the category women (Wiegman 2000: 808). But, as Wiegman argues, the assumption of a glorious past, a present crisis and a problematic future takes for granted the linear view of feminism's origin and development presupposing that some feminists, like black feminists and queer feminists, entered "late", while they have always been there, in struggles against sexism, racism and heteronormativity (Tornhill and Tolvhed 2008). Only less visible.

Without a doubt, the ideas of a common identity and a unified subject of feminism have been powerfully contested, but there is indeed no direct link from post-structural accounts on gender, and the strategy of displacement, to political strategies. Diversity theorists sometimes engage in political activism by adopting some kind of equality and/or difference perspective and, despite the theoretical deconstruction of the category women, it is common for theorists to advocate a form of "strategic essentialism" in political practice (Spivak 1987, in Squires 1999).

At the level of political practice and public policies, women are generally still assumed as the subjects of gender equality policies. As argued before, the category "women" appears to be both necessary and problematic at the same time. I take this tension into account by focusing on the ways in which discourses produce gender, constructing certain normative subject positions while marginalizing others.

2.3 Gender inequality and "women's work": care and domestic work

In the following sections I will focus on the link between the problem of gender inequality and what has traditionally been constructed as women's work: care and domestic work. As I have pointed out before, the present study of different articulations of gender inequality particularly analyzes public policies surrounding care work and domestic work, and the representations of gender inequality would probably look very different if I studied, for instance, policies to combat gendered violence.

In feminist theory, care and domestic work have been represented as linked to the problem of gender inequality in different ways and I will now explore more in depth how gender inequality is connected to the notion of women's work. Early feminist work reclaimed unpaid care or domestic labour as "work" and highlighted the sexual division of labour. Debates centred upon the question of exploitation of women's unpaid care and domestic work in the home and the need to increase women's participation in paid work, on the one hand, and to promote an equal sharing of work in the home between women and men, on the other. Other scholars rejected the idea of female caregivers as victims, preferring to focus on the meanings of care in women's lives and experiences.

While feminists have often considered care and domestic work to be a common burden imposed on women, some researchers have come to question this idea. The focus on paid non-kin forms of domestic work and home-based care is useful in order to grasp

the intersections of class and race/ethnicity alongside gender. Nonetheless, studies on women's unpaid care work in the home and women's paid domestic work are seldom informed by each other. Addressing this gap in the literature, my empirical analysis combines an examination of debates surrounding unpaid work performed by women for family members ("reconciliation of work and family life" and "dependent care") and debates surrounding paid domestic (care) work ("domestic service").

Even though the interconnectedness of the categories of gender, class and race/ethnicity in the construction of meanings of care and domestic work is not new, researchers have only recently started to emphasize the global divisions among women constituted in care and domestic work. The insights stemming from the "global care chains" literature have implications for the welfare state analysis I develop as they motivate the inclusion of the policy debate on paid domestic (care) work and the adoption of an intersectional analytical approach. But I also argue that studies on "global care chains" do not pay sufficient attention to how the welfare state shapes the meanings attached to paid domestic (care) work.

Studies of domestic service and the globalization of care work have tended to emphasize the exploitation or the emancipation of domestic workers. In my view, both processes can be involved, but this has to be studied empirically and cannot be assumed *a priori*. The empirical analysis I develop explores the ways in which the state, through its public policies, shapes care and domestic work by, for instance, constructing domestic workers as a solution to problems such as the "reconciliation of work and family life". A "top-down" perspective can show how public policies operate as enabling or restraining for migrant domestic workers in specific contexts.

2.3.1 Perspectives on "women's work"

Concepts operate in different ways in different contexts, and feminist approaches have referred to "women's work" in terms of domestic labour, housework, reproductive work, unpaid work, care work, family work, etc. These terms, in turn, can be located in different feminist theoretical strands with different conceptualizations of gender (in)equality. For instance, liberal feminism has built upon the private/ public divide in its accounts on gender equality endorsing women's participation in the public sphere and liberation from the "domestic" sphere. In Marxist feminism, domestic labour has been conceptualized as women's common burden, rooted in a patriarchal and capitalist oppression. The idea of a common oppression was criticized by black feminist thought, pointing at the different meanings of family, care and domestic work for black women. There now seems to be a tendency to conceptualize care and domestic work as linked to intersectionality, particularly to the categories gender, class and race/ethnicity. Welfare state researchers have widely analyzed the relationship between care related policies and gender equality in different countries and that field will be more profoundly explored in chapter 4.

Theories on care have attempted to answer the question: what is care? From the point of view of the analysis of problem representations, this is not a relevant question, but rather impossible to reply. Instead, care can fruitfully be understood from the

perspective of discourses surrounding care, how care is talked about, and different meanings of care in specific contexts (Dahl 2000: 82). Fiona Williams (2001) sustains that the research on care has never been far from the politics of care. I am precisely analyzing the politics of care and not the nature of care or domestic work as such. While feminist theorizing on care work has often focused on care *per se*, I will focus on the construction of meanings of care work and domestic work in relation to the problem of gender inequality in specific policy debates. I argue that politics of care provide a critical case for gender studies because discourses surrounding care crucially inform the ways in which gender inequality is interpreted as a policy problem, and vice versa. The theorizing on care and domestic work is relevant for me in the sense that it provides a notion of different ways of interpreting the relationship between care and domestic work, on the one hand, and gender (in)equality, on the other.

I analyze both care work and domestic work, seeing them as inherently intertwined and overlapping works difficult to separate from each other. As Hillary Rose writes, “even where feminists tried to separate housework from peoplework, the two continually merged” (Rose 1995: 39). Helma Lutz underlines that domestic work involves a heterogeneity of tasks, ranging from cleaning, washing and cooking to caring for children, the elderly and infirm (Lutz 2002: 92). That distinguishing between care work and domestic work can be problematic also becomes clear in the empirical study. Great part of the work that migrant domestic workers perform in Spain is indeed care work, while in Sweden paid domestic work is more often associated with cleaning (Kvist and Peterson 2010). Child care and elderly care are often the main responsibilities of domestic workers (Anderson 2000: 15). Following from this, Raquel Martínez Buján emphasizes the notion of “domestic care work” to underline the great importance of care work that is ignored when we speak of “domestic work” or “domestic service” (2007: 5). When I want to point at the importance of care work in domestic service, while recognizing that not all domestic service is care work, I put care in parentheses: domestic (care) work. Dichotomizing between care and domestic work is problematic because it “conceals how caring for children includes such tasks as changing diapers, toilet training, and cleaning soiled clothes”. It is more accurate, then, to depict such work “as part of a continuum of care-related activities” (Bowman and Cole 2009: 174).

I am inspired by Drucilla Barker (2005) who emphasizes that feminists study “women’s work” but, at the same time, aim to destabilize that designation. This means that I am interested in analyzing and problematizing constructions of women’s work by means of a critical analysis of different representations of gender inequality in politics of care. In her attempt to destabilize the designation of “women’s work”, Barker draws upon a notion of gender as a property of symbolic and conceptual systems. She criticizes notions of gender that see biological difference between the sexes as the basis for the social differentiation in a way that gender socialization assigns feminine traits to females and masculine to males. With this notion of gender, “caring is a female trait because normal feminine identity is one believed to be naturally endowed with both the capacity and the desire to care for others. Normal masculine identity, on the other hand, is understood to be lacking these capacities. Feminists who leave the sex/gender dichotomy in place are then faced with the question of whether women should be socialized like men or if women, in fact, are naturally different from men. In other words, the equality/difference dichotomy is left intact” (Barker, 2005: 2200). By looking at gender

as discursively constructed we open up for a deconstruction of the link between women and care. I do not consider care and domestic work *a priori* women's work, but the analysis I develop explores the ways in which policy discourses articulate this kind of work as feminine work or a "women's problem". In feminist research the gendered carer is often the point of departure. In this study the focus lies particularly on care and domestic work and workers, and not on the care receiver.

Within the literature on care we can find different interpretations of care work. As an illustrative example, Paula England (2005) identifies five different conceptual frameworks deployed in the literature on care work, mainly articulated by gender scholars: care work as devaluated work, care as a public good, care workers as "prisoners of love", care as "commodification of emotion" and care as related to both "love and money". These perspectives show how care work can be represented as a social problem in many different ways. The "devaluation" perspective argues that care work is badly rewarded because care is associated with women and often women of colour. The "public good" framework contends that care work provides social benefits far beyond those to the recipients of care and they are hard to capture without state intervention. The "prisoner of love" approach points out that the intrinsic caring motives of care workers allow employers to get away more easily with paying less for care work than for other kinds of work. The "commodification of emotion" approach focuses on the emotional harm to mainly workers from poor countries when they have to sell services as nannies in the First World. The "love and money" approach rejects the dichotomous view of market as antithetical to "true" care and argues against the idea that good care can only be found in families or communities, non-profit organizations and state provision. It should be clarified that the analysis I develop does not take a specific problem as given but scrutinizes the ways in which policies surrounding care and domestic work articulate gender inequality as a policy problem in different contexts.

Carol Thomas (1993) argues that research on care usually focuses on either informal or formal care, either paid or unpaid care. Thomas suggests a unified concept which involves recognition of both paid and unpaid care work, both formal and informal care, care performed as a public service and care performed within the family. The policy debates that I analyze are related to both formal and informal care, both paid and unpaid care, both "public" and "private" care. However, I do not aim to develop a unified concept of care since the emphasis lies on the meanings attributed to care and domestic work in specific contexts. The analysis explores the ways in which care is represented as a problem of gender inequality or, reversely, not linked to gender inequality. The analysis also asks how and when care is framed as a private or public problem.

2.3.2 Exploitation and emancipation: debates on the sexual division of labour

Research on care and domestic work has developed from multiple perspectives since the 1970s. Before that, care and domestic work represented few challenges for social research and rather belonged "naturally" to the female world of mothers, daughters, sisters, and female servants. With feminist scholarship as the main driving force, studies

have attempted to tease out the different relational, symbolic, political and practical aspects of care and domestic work (Saraceno 2008). While domestic labour was central at first, feminist analysis has over time come to distinguish care work as crucial part of domestic or reproductive work.

Since the 1970s feminist research has focused on the sexual division of labour between women and men, the exploitation of women's unpaid labour as caregivers and the role of the state in maintaining this. The work on unpaid, unacknowledged housework exposed the social nature of the sexual division of labour and brought this social division into visibility. Central to the concept of care were the links to oppressed labour but also the claim for recognition and reward for carers (Williams 2001: 475; Rose 1994: 29). Among the key contributions of early feminist research was the reclaiming of unpaid care or domestic work as "work". Feminists demanded that unpaid household work, performed mainly by women, should be recognized as an essential part of the economy. The issue of a salary for domestic work was intensely debated by feminists all over Europe. The problem of gender inequality centred on the exploitation of women's unpaid work in the home, and gender equality was related to women's equal participation in paid work and men's equal sharing of work in the home. The need to recognize domestic labour, unpaid labour and care work as highly significant work for society was emphasized and, thus, the need to upgrade the status of the work (Lutz 2007; Hrženjak 2007; Lewis 1992).

The feminist revision of domestic labour has largely been inspired by Marxist production/ reproduction debates and by psychoanalytical approaches, as articulated in feminist standpoint theory. Early feminist work within Marxist theory underlined that in a patriarchal system women are exploited regardless of their class status. Marxist feminists attempted to go behind the appearance of love, the naturalness of women's place and women's work, to reveal the relations of domination and subordination under patriarchy (Rose 1994: 30). Gender oppression was seen as caused by the sexual division of labour, which in the capitalist system meant the division between paid and unpaid work, between productive and reproductive work (Barker 2005: 2192). Marxist approaches emphasized that women are exploited by capitalists because their care work makes current and next generations more productive and, hence, capitalists benefit from unpaid homemakers as well as from paid workers (England 2005). Women's housework benefits capitalism and, therefore, it should be paid (Rose 1994: 45). Feminist rethinking of women's work had to tackle a central assumption within the patriarchal ideology of work, namely, that where "skill" is there are usually no women (ibid. 37). Skills acquired by women through work in the home have been undervalued and also systematically denied, their social origin being constructed as natural.

Feminist theory acknowledged that care was associated with feminine work but also questioned that caring was inherent or natural to women. Women's overrepresentation in caring was interpreted as a result of patriarchal structures. By reclaiming care as work, feminists criticized the idea of care as a "labour of love", yet they did not deny the emotional and relational dimensions of unpaid care and domestic work performed for family members. The associations of care as inherently feminine and an expression of love were regarded as eclipsing the work dimension. Researchers underlined the problem of "compulsory altruism" in women's family-oriented care (Leira and Saraceno 2002: 61; Daly and Lewis 1999: 13).

Feminist perspectives on care and domestic work have shifted, since the 1980s, in line with the general shifts in feminist theory: from women as victims relegated to the private sphere towards a celebration of women's difference and a women-centred culture. Research focused on the meanings of care for women, for their identity and their view of the world (Williams 2001: 475). In other words, while the first phase of feminist research on "women's work" was concerned with claiming it as real work and as largely evaded by men, the second phase began to explore the labour process of caring and the meanings attributed to care work by the caregiver (Rose 1994: 38). Rather than focusing on female caregivers as victims of oppressive labour, the focus fell on the meanings of care in women's lives and experiences. The feminist epistemology privileges women's lived experiences of caring, particularly mothering. The ethics of care was articulated by social psychologist Carol Gilligan. In her work *In a different voice* (1982) Gilligan suggests that there are gender differences in the moral frameworks within which men and women operate. While men's moral frameworks are connected with the notion of rights, subject to public and rational assessment, women's moral frameworks are underpinned by the notion of responsibility, linked to caregiving. Hence, she poses the female ethics of care against the male ethics of justice. Critics argued that her ethics of care was underpinned by an essentialist understanding of gender differences and an assumption of the heterosexual family as the norm. Other researchers have attempted to readdress difference in theorizing on the ethics of care in order to move beyond the gendered binary of ethics of justice vs. ethics of care. Such studies explore how the ethics of care can be linked to public democratic practices and the notion of citizenship. Selma Sevenhuijsen advocates the ethics of care as a key element of citizenship, given that the processes of caring and being cared for draws attention to interdependence and the need for acceptance of difference. This view rejects a liberal notion of individuals as autonomous beings, focusing on people as interdependent and potential carers and care-receivers (Sevenhuijsen 1998, in Williams 2001: 475-6).

Feminist economist Drucilla Barker (2005) critically examines liberal and socialist feminist theories on the relationship between care and gender inequality. Both approaches have considered women's subordinate role in paid labour markets as restrained by their primary role in unpaid household labour. Liberal feminists have attempted to explain differences in labour market outcomes between women and men and how the unequal distribution of household work affects those outcomes. Gender equality requires women to participate in the labour market on the same terms as men and, in order to achieve this, domestic and care work should be commodified and produced by either private companies or the state. Socialist feminists have focused on the ways in which women are exploited in performing unpaid reproductive work in the household and the economic significance of this work. Women's unequal position in the labour market is caused by their subordinate role in the household, and the solution then is the equal sharing of domestic work between women and men. The approaches differ in the sense that the liberal interpretation assumes that gender inequality diminishes as women participate in paid work as men do, while the socialist one assumes that inequality is weakened as men share unpaid domestic work with women. Problems can be found in both perspectives. The emphasis on women's participation in the labour market as empowering overlooks the exploitation and inequalities associated with the feminization of labour. The attempts to valorize work typically associated with women's

work seems to disregard the role that care and domestic work play in sustaining women's subordinate status.

In the 1990s, in response to the limitations of earlier work, research focused on care from the point of view of disability, race/ethnicity and sexuality in terms of non-heterosexual families as the place of care. Studies emphasized the different power relations, places, contexts and strategies involved in care, drawing attention to the challenges posed by disability, race and migration. Some studies have emphasized care as embodying an oppressive history in which practices and discourses of paid and unpaid carers have maintained the disabled and elderly in a position of undignified dependency or patronizing protection, making them unable to exercise any agency over their lives (Leira and Saraceno 2002; Williams 2001: 476-8). Disabled feminists, black feminists and older feminists began to push against a conceptualization of care which had produced an image of the world from the perspective of white, able-bodied and heterosexual women (Rose 1994: 47). The debates resulted in that the cared for were taken into account and not just the carers. By underlining that caring relationships take place in a variety of social contexts, there was also recognition of the differences between various types of care, for example, between elderly care and child care (Rose 1994: 48). In sum, there have been tendencies to move away from the grand theories of care and to be more specific by contextualizing care and diversifying the studied forms of care. The present study follows this trend in the sense that it is not interested in developing a grand theory on care but in analyzing the different ways of framing gender inequality in care related policies in specific contexts. It also elaborates an intersectional approach towards the politics of care. This is the focus of the section below.

2.3.3 Intersectionality and the globalization of care and domestic work

While many feminists have considered care and domestic work to be a common burden of all women imposed by patriarchy (and capitalism) researchers have come to question the idea of care and domestic work as a "common burden". Hilary Graham (1991: 61) analyzes paid non-kin forms of domestic work and home-based care in order to grasp the intersections of class and race alongside gender, arguing that in feminist research the ways in which other inequalities are intertwined with domestic and care work are largely marginalized. While, as Bridget Anderson (2000) points out, studies on women's unpaid care work in the home and women's paid domestic work are seldom informed by each other, my empirical analysis combines the examination of unpaid work performed by women for family members (in the debates on reconciliation and dependent care) and paid domestic work (in the debates on domestic service).

Numerous scholars have contributed to an understanding of the relationship between care and domestic work and intersectionality. The interconnectedness of categories of gender, class and race/ethnicity and care work is not a new phenomenon, nor does it constitute a new field of research, which post-colonial feminist theories and black feminist thought reveal (Lewis 2006). As we have seen, Patricia Hill Collins' (1991) work emphasizes black women's different experiences in relation to the domestic sphere, referring to, among other aspects, black women doing domestic work in white

families. Hill Collins argues that caring for others is reflected in Afrocentric knowledge and practice. She sees similarities between Afrocentric expressions of the ethics of caring and those advanced by feminist scholars (Rose 1994: 48). bell hooks argues that although there are theoretical and historical grounds for solidarity between women, it should not be grounded on the notion of a common oppression related to “women’s work” given its multiple meanings (hooks 2000, in Barker 2005: 2196). As Barker suggests, it is necessary to acknowledge the instability of the category “women” and to analyze the ways in which discourses on gender, race, class and sexuality constitute the meanings, content, and economic valuation of the work that women do (Barker 2005: 2191). Behaviour or practices are interpreted very differently depending on if they are displayed by women or men, but they are also interpreted according to race, class, and sexuality. Barker’s example of child care in the U.S. is illuminating: When a poor African-American woman quits her job to take care of her children, she is represented as a lazy parasite and her care work has no value. However, when a well-off white woman does the same thing, she is rather represented as a good mother. The difference lays not in the nature of the work but in the different representations of the caregiver (2005: 2201).

As Chandra Talpade Mohanty argues, the concept “sexual division of labour” can be useful only through contextual analysis. The sexual division of labour has often been used in order to provide explanations for women’s subordination, assuming universal applicability and without specification of geographic and historical context: “how is it possible to refer to “the” sexual division of labour when the content of this division changes radically from one environment to the next, and from one historical conjuncture to another? At its most abstract level, it is the fact of the differential assignation of tasks according to sex that is significant; however, this is quite different from the meaning or value that the content of this sexual division of labour assumes in different contexts” (Mohanty 1997: 210). The concept of the “sexual division of labour” is more than just a descriptive category. It indicates the differential value placed on “men’s work” and “women’s work”. Often the mere existence of a sexual division of labour is taken as a proof of the oppression of women; yet, apparently similar situations may have radically different, historically specific, explanations and interpretations. The example of the rise of female-headed households among white, middle-class women and among black and Chicano women in the US is revealing. While the former may be a sign of women’s independence and progress, the latter can be seen as part of the feminization of poverty. The existence of a sexual division of labour in most contexts cannot be sufficient explanation for the universal subjugation of women in the labour force. Following from this, the way the sexual division of labour indicates gender inequality and a devaluation of women’s work must be explored through empirical scrutiny in particular contexts, as I will do in the empirical analysis.

Some feminist researchers have highlighted the globalization of care and domestic work and to the divisions among women constituted in this process. These studies focus on the process by which migrant women from the Third World are increasingly employed by private households in the First World to perform care and domestic work, or the “dirty work” as Bridget Anderson (2000) names it in her writings. At the same time, these migrant women leave family members to be taken care of in their home countries. Theories on “global care chains” and the “international transfer of caretaking”

(Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003; Salazar Parreñas 2001) have raised questions of different forms of social inequality involved in the global economy of care. The global care chain has attracted attention across a range of different social science fields, in particular globalization studies, migration studies, care studies and gender studies (Yeates 2005: 2). Care is not just a question of changing relations between the state, the market, the family and the community, but also a question of geopolitical inequalities between states which affect individuals in gendered and racialized ways (Williams 2001: 470). Researchers have highlighted the often exploitative conditions of work, the asymmetrical power relations between workers and employers and the racist stereotypes that underpin the employment of certain ethnic groups and nationalities (Anderson and Phizacklea, 1997; Lutz, 2002; Caixeta et al. 2004; Bakan and Stasiulis 1995). In tying women to the private and men to the public many feminists have assumed homogeneity of oppression and ignored other kinds of power relations, related to class, race/ethnicity, nation, etc. But the study of the globalization of domestic work forces us to acknowledge that worldwide millions of homes are workplaces and millions of workplaces are homes (Blackett 2005). The question whether domestic service can be considered a real job given the “special” conditions of work has been explored in different ways. In this study I contend that it is essential to explore the ways in which this work is constructed as “different” or “just another job” in public policies (see, for instance, Calleman 2007). The inquiry is not about whether the work is naturally/ essentially different from other kinds of work.

As Helma Lutz maintains, the analysis of the globalization of domestic work reveals challenges to gender studies: “the private sphere as a work place seems to be predestined for an intersectional analysis of social positioning and social space in which categories of ethnicity, class, gender and nationality must be combined” (Lutz 2002: 98). The globalization of care and domestic work definitively reinforces the need for intersectional analytical perspectives. When it comes to domestic service, the possibility of speaking of women as a homogenous category is problematic and, therefore, it is necessary to move beyond uniform understandings of the category women; women are differently positioned in relation to the issue of domestic service (Kvist, Carbin and Harjunen 2009).

The focus often lies on women’s experiences of domestic work, and the relation between employer and employee, both female. In much of the literature on global care chains these chains entail a relationship between women; women purchase the low-wage services of poorer women. In globalization it is migrant women workers from the South who are increasingly freeing women in the global North of the burden of “women’s work” (Parreñas 2004; Blackett 2004). Nonetheless, one should not forget that the conceptualization of “women’s work” has been criticized by feminists for a long time and, albeit female labour is central to global care chains, it is important to emphasize the role of men (as employers if not employees) in this process (Yeates 2005: 2). The focus of this study is on how care and domestic work are constructed as women’s work and, hence, *not* men’s work, and the aim is to problematize this representation.

Helma Lutz highlights that there exist contradictory approaches to domestic service; some emphasize the exploitation of domestic workers and others underline the emancipation, agency and potential empowerment of the migrant women involved (Lutz 2002). I believe both empowerment and disempowerment can be involved in the process of globalization of care but this has to be studied empirically and cannot be assumed *a*

priori. While I recognize the importance of studies that focus on the experiences and strategies of domestic workers, I think the analysis I develop, which takes a “top-down” perspective by analyzing state discourses in authoritative policy documents, can say something about migrant care workers’ positions, their opportunities and constraints. Exploring public policies and processes of privileging and exclusion, I attempt to reveal the ways in which domestic workers are positioned in dominant policy discourses. In focusing upon the migration process and experiences of paid domestic work and less on the (welfare) state, theories on global care chains do not pay sufficient attention to the role of the state in shaping meanings of paid domestic care work. The empirical analysis I develop explores the ways in which the state articulates meanings of care and domestic work by, for instance, constructing domestic workers as a viable and legitimate solution to problems like the “reconciliation of work and family life”. In the next chapter I fully enter the discussion on the relationship between the state, particularly the welfare state, and gender (in)equality.

2.4 Summary

The first part of this chapter shows that there are *multiple ways of framing gender*. It also outlines the ideas that constitute the basis for the intersectional approach. The sex/gender distinction introduced in the 1970s was developed to avoid biological determinism based on the category of sex. This distinction, which defines sex as biologically determined and gender as socially constructed, has been central to a significant body of gender theory. Furthermore, gender has been conceptualized as related to women’s privileged access to knowledge, presupposing a common oppression. With an emphasis on gender difference, theorists have developed a feminist standpoint theory, privileging women’s experiences of mothering and the sexual division of labour. However, universalizing tendencies have provoked many debates within feminism and the idea of a coherent notion of women as a crucial element for feminist politics has been disputed. The question of differences between women has been raised by black women, lesbians and women of working-class background. Post-structuralism, post-colonial theory and queer theory have challenged unified notions of the category women.

Subsequently, taking intersectionality seriously is a crucial point. Within this vein, I argue that gender must be understood as inherently interlocked with categories such as class, race/ethnicity and sexuality. These categories cannot be seen as additive but as constituting each other; they overlap and are articulated by each other in concrete social relations. The category “women” is normative and exclusionary and is often invoked with the dimensions of class and racial privilege intact. Gender is not constituted coherently or consistently in different historical moments and it becomes impossible to separate gender from the political and cultural contexts in which it is produced and maintained. Following from this, I emphasize that gender relations cannot be understood without contextualizing them. Within this vein, the analysis explores the ways in which gender and gender inequality are discursively produced in policy debates surrounding care and domestic work in the specific contexts of Spain and Sweden. Intersectionality has, crucially, involved placing those who are currently marginalized in the centre but, as I have argued,

social categories do not count only for the marginalized, the non-privileged “Other”. In this study, using the concept of intersectionality as an analytical tool means exploring the ways in which dominant discourses privilege certain groups of women (and men) over others.

The second part of the chapter enters more in depth the discussions surrounding the concept of *equality*. When analyzing policy discourses on gender equality, it becomes important to scrutinize the political strategies that can be adopted in the struggle to achieve this goal. Dominant feminist debates have gone from emphasizing gender equality to highlighting difference and to focusing on multiple intersecting inequalities and intersectionality. Following from this, feminist strategies have shifted among the strategy of inclusion stressing equality, the strategy of reversal emphasizing difference and the strategy of displacement which is aimed at deconstructing binary oppositions such as equality/difference. The strategy of inclusion seeks gender neutrality; the strategy of reversal seeks recognition for a specifically female gendered identity; and the strategy of displacement seeks to deconstruct the fiction of the category “women”. The different feminist strategies are analytically useful for the present work in order to identify and critically analyze dominant normative assumptions on gender inequality within the policy debates. The different approaches will have different effects upon women and men and, following from this, it is important to analyze whether policy problems are constructed with a focus on equality or difference, or diversity. As I have argued, the purpose is not to evaluate which strategy is the “best” one to achieve “real” equality. Instead, the aim is a critical analysis of the dominant representations of gender inequality produced within discourse by means of a focus on normative assumptions and exclusion.

In the third part of the chapter I have emphasized the different linkages between *women’s work* and gender (in)equality. The constructions of the problem of gender inequality that I analyze in this study are not separable from the issue of care and domestic work. As I have pointed out, the representations of gender inequality would be different if I focused on another policy area. Early feminist work made an important point in reclaiming unpaid care or domestic labour as “work”; the problem of gender inequality centred on the exploitation of women’s unpaid care and domestic work in the home, and gender equality was related to women’s equal participation in paid work and men’s equal sharing of work in the home. Criticism has been directed to both perspectives. While the idea of women’s participation in the labour market as empowering has tended to ignore inequalities associated with work life, the attempts to valorize the work typically associated with women’s work has tended to reinforce women’s roles as carers and risk sustaining women’s subordinate status.

Feminists have often considered care and domestic work to be women’s common burden, and a shift in focus from unpaid to paid forms of domestic work and home-based care can be useful in order to grasp the intersections of class and race/ethnicity alongside gender. Indeed, some researchers emphasize the global divisions among women constituted in care and domestic work. Nonetheless, studies on women’s unpaid care work in the home (as in studies on gender and the welfare state) and women’s paid domestic work (as in the global care chains literature) are seldom informed by each other. Addressing this weakness, my empirical analysis combines an examination of debates surrounding unpaid work performed by women for family members and debates surrounding paid domestic (care) work. Research on global care chains points at the

importance of incorporating intersectionality into welfare state analysis and the study of policy problems. The insights stemming from the literature on global care chains motivate the inclusion in the study of the policy debate on paid domestic work. In contrast, I argue that studies on global care chains do not pay sufficient attention to how the welfare state produces the meanings of different forms of care and domestic work. The empirical analysis I develop adopts a “top-down” perspective exploring the ways in which the state, through its public policies, shapes care and domestic work. Policies can operate as both enabling and restraining for domestic workers, but this has to be examined through empirical analysis.

The review of the multiple constructions of gender and (in)equality articulated in feminist theory is useful in order to better understand the relationship between gender and the welfare state which is the focus of this study. Policy discourses can be both enabling and restraining and I argue that, depending on the way in which gender inequality is articulated as a policy problem in specific state discourses, the effects can be empowering and/or disempowering. In order to critically assess gender equality policies, it becomes important to analyze the way in which gender is constructed; for instance, enhancing the male as norm, focusing on structural patriarchal oppression, or considering the intersection of gender with other categories such as class, race/ethnicity and sexuality. The theoretical debates presented in this chapter inspire my readings of the empirical material. The analysis of the different policy debates that form part of the (re)construction of the welfare state (the reconciliation of work and family life, dependent care and domestic service) asks: “How is gender inequality represented in official policy texts?” Thus, the focus lies on the ways in which state discourses produce certain representations of gender inequality as a policy problem, and particular visions of equality, while marginalizing others. Next chapter aims to explore the relationship between the state, particularly the welfare state, and gender (in)equality.

3 Beyond the “women-friendly” welfare state

Studies on gender and the welfare state are the focus of this chapter. Feminist welfare state studies have adopted diverse focuses, for instance, analyzing family policy, employment policies, citizenship and social exclusion. Care has become an important issue within the field of welfare state research. Given the sexual division of labour whereby women, and not men, perform care and domestic work, feminist welfare state research has made care a central concern in its articulations of the problem of gender inequality and its visions of gender equality. My object of study is politics of care in European welfare states, and I define politics of care as a process of constructing meanings of care. Therefore, I will here pay particular attention to welfare state studies focusing on care.

The different policy debates analyzed in this study can be seen as an integral part of the (re)construction and legitimation of the welfare state. As such, the discourses are both shaped by and shaping welfare state change. They reveal the continuous negotiation of (welfare) state boundaries and the construction of gender inequality as a related policy problem. The examination of Spanish and Swedish debates surrounding the issues of reconciliation of work and family life, dependent care and domestic service aims to contribute to our understanding of gender and the welfare state. The debates on reconciliation of work and family life, focusing on parental leaves and benefits, and on dependent care, focusing mainly on elderly care, are traditionally framed as central to welfare state analysis. While many feminist welfare state studies choose to analyze parental leaves and childcare or elderly care, this study analyzes these issues together to be able to say something about the dominating discourses shared across the debates and divergences between them. As explained in the previous chapter, drawing upon the insights stemming from global care chains research I also analyze policy debates surrounding domestic (care) service. Hence, this issue is analyzed jointly with the more traditional subject matters of welfare state studies. I also argue that global care chains research does not pay sufficient attention to the role of the state in articulating meanings and value of care and domestic work. Welfare state policies shape care and domestic work, for instance, by constructing domestic workers as a viable solution to care problems like the “reconciliation of work and family life”. Following from this, the analysis I develop takes a top-down perspective highlighting the ways in which the state articulates meanings and value of paid and unpaid domestic work and its links to gender inequality.

Feminist welfare state studies have contributed extensively to our understanding of how gender is inscribed in welfare states and social policies, given that the state enhances certain norms such as male breadwinner/female caretaker. The research has examined the attribution of responsibility of caring; between state responsibility and individual, private solutions (family or market). A substantial body of literature analyzes the gendering of the welfare state from a comparative perspective. This research has often, explicitly or implicitly, put forward an ideal “women-friendly” welfare state associated with the “caring state”; a state that widely assumes responsibility in care provision. The notion of the “women-friendly” welfare state can be challenged with respect to the question of intersectionality. Critical analyses have shown that the notion

of the women-friendly welfare state rests upon a view on women's interests as common and collective and essentially different from the interests of men. Additionally, women's labour market participation sometimes appears uncritically regarded as the key to gender equality, associating paid work with success and self-fulfilment while marginalizing the experience of working-class women. An exclusionary vision of gender equality, equality only for white, heterosexual, working mothers, emerges. I argue in this chapter that intersectionality also speaks to the assumptions of the "women-unfriendly" welfare state, where gender inequality mainly seems to concern white, middle-class, and heterosexual home-making mothers. Policies have tended to privilege white, middle-class women encouraging them to be stay-at-home mothers, while refusing migrant and working-class women this support.

In sum, comparative gender and welfare state studies often overlook the implications of intersectionality and, hence, the developments in feminist theory. Given the exclusionary norms embedded in the articulation of gender inequality as a problem and the exclusionary visions of gender equality in feminist welfare state research, I argue that it is useful to develop a feminist welfare state analysis that enables an examination of the underlying normative assumptions and exclusion of dominant discourses on gender inequality. Furthermore, a weakness of comparative studies on gender and welfare states is that they often overgeneralize differences between states and overlook differences within states. The comparative approach adopted here is inspired by post-structural feminist accounts of the state which emphasize the heterogeneous and differentiated nature of the state, recognizing diversity and contradictory effects. State intervention involves a variety of institutions, policies and processes which in turn have different effects, on women and men. Consequently, the state can also have differentiated effects on women.

Following from these criticisms, I argue that the concept of intersectionality is a useful analytical tool for welfare state research. As such, this study presents a critical analysis of the politics of care and particularly the normative and exclusionary assumptions of gender inequality. Political intersectionality here refers to the study of normative subjects and exclusion in public policies. I recognize that care policies can be considered generally empowering for women enabling them to be mothers, daughters and paid workers. But care-related policies cannot be interpreted as automatically empowering for (all) women. This needs to be explored through empirical inquiry. Instead of presupposing that some welfare states are "women-friendly" and others are "women-unfriendly", I emphasize that, depending on the ways in which policies construct meanings of gender and categories of class, race/ethnicity and sexuality, they can be seen as having empowering and/or disempowering effects. Consequently, the analysis shows how care-related policies that aim to improve gender equality can at the same time marginalize "other" women.

The chapter is organized as follows. Firstly, I scrutinize the ways in which gender inequality has been conceptualized in relation to the state. Secondly, I focus on the relationship between gender (in)equality and the welfare state in comparative research, with special attention to care. Thirdly, I examine the exclusionary foundations of the notion of the caring women-friendly welfare state and the non-caring women-unfriendly welfare state. This critical assessment will inspire the reading of the empirical material and motivate the analytical framework scrutinizing gender inequality as a policy problem

(see chapter 4). Fourthly, European welfare states are discussed in the context of recent and ongoing changes and the interrelation between gender, care and migration regimes is underlined. The concept of political intersectionality is argued to be a useful analytical tool for welfare state research, and here the concept refers to the study of normative subjects and exclusion in public policies.

3.1 Gender and the state

Before exploring comparative gender and the welfare state research, I will here first present different theoretical approaches to gender and the state. In the brief review of the literature I am interested in the normative assumptions about the state; whether the state is considered women-friendly or women-unfriendly (or both). In feminist theory the state has been conceptualized in multiple ways. Nordic feminism has regarded the state as relatively friendly and supportive of women's everyday lives, while US and British feminists, radical feminists and anti-racist accounts have interpreted the state as coercive for women and black and working-class people's lives (Rose 1994: 48). Political scientist Johanna Kantola (2006) makes an excellent overview of different feminist theories of the state as she identifies conceptualizations of the state as neutral, patriarchal, capitalist, women-friendly and differentiated. I draw upon her discussion but I distinguish between three general approaches in theorizing the state, linking these theories to the three analytically different feminist political strategies identified by Judith Squires (1999): the strategies of "inclusion", "reversal" and "displacement". Hence, I will distinguish between liberal, Marxist/radical and post-structural feminist theories surrounding the state. Finally, I will argue that the analysis I develop draws above all on post-structural accounts of gender and the state, given the emphasis on intersectionality and the differentiated nature of the state.

3.1.1 Liberal perspectives of the state: the "women-friendly" state

The pursuit of inclusion, promoted by liberal feminists, aims to include women in the political and economic spheres from which they are currently excluded. This strategy usually aspires to impartiality, to conceive people as autonomous, and to promote politics of equality. The strategy of inclusion aims to add women in and, at the same time, it seeks gender neutrality (Squires 1999: 3). Liberal feminism, which is the strand that has demanded changes in the legislation and the integration of women in the public sphere, has considered the state as neutral (Bustelo 2004). The state operates as a neutral arbiter capable of responding to any interest group that mobilizes political resources (McBride and Mazur 1995: 9). In other words, the state is an instrument in the hands of the interest groups that control it. Liberal feminism seeks initiatives, legislation and policies that deal with women's concerns, promoting more women's policies in order to decrease the influence of masculine interests. The ideal is that sex should not be relevant in the public sphere; instead, women and men should be regarded as equal citizens, and formal

equality and equal treatment in the public sphere should be main principles. On the whole, the state is seen as benign (Kantola 2006: 4-5).

Susan Moller Okin (1979; 1989), a liberal feminist political philosopher, re-conceptualizes the private/public division and gender inequality within the family within the framework of liberal state theory. She emphasizes that gender structures in the family are an impediment to women and men's equal opportunity in the public sphere, and that the state should intervene to change these structures (1989: 23). She writes that "it is clear that the structure of the family and the distribution of roles and responsibilities within it must be significantly altered in any theory in which women are to be equal human beings and equal participants in the public realm" (1979: 281). Okin sustains that a democratic family with complete equality and mutual dependence between the sexes is a premise of a democratic theory and society (ibid. 289). A "genderless" family would be more just; more just to women, more conducive to equal opportunity, and more favourable for the rearing of citizens in a just society. A genderless family would also imply greater freedom for individuals (1989: 183-5). The state is considered to be benevolent towards women, and feminists can demonstrate the necessity to reformulate public involvement in the private sphere to undermine inequality and women's lack of freedom. In Okin's view, the state should guarantee parental leave rights, assume responsibility for changing gender roles within the family, and provide much of the care work of the private household such as childcare and elderly care.

Feminist re-conceptualizations of the liberal state have been criticized from different perspectives. It has been pointed out that liberal feminist theory of the state fails to understand structural inequalities and male dominance, overemphasizing the possibility of women's agency. The principle of formal equality leaves a lot to be desired in social and economic matters. Critics have seen a danger in women's entering the state as this may lead to the loss of an alternative feminist discourse based on women's experiences as caretakers and providers of the needs of others (Kantola 2006: 5, 31). No matter how many women enter the state and public positions, the state will still reflect and promote the hierarchy of male domination and female subordination (McBride and Mazur 1995: 9). From this perspective, integrating women in state institutions reproduces patriarchal norms and practices. This leads us to the second approach which articulates a much more negative view of the state.

3.1.2 Marxist and radical perspectives on the state: the "women-unfriendly" state

The strategy of reversal, pursued by Marxist and radical feminists, aims to reconfigure the "political" as currently conceived so that it becomes more open to gender specificity. This strategy often implies advocating politics of difference, seeking recognition for a specifically female gendered identity and to assert a feminine perspective (Squires 1999: 3). The state became an object of Marxist feminist research in the 1970s when feminists attempted to reformulate Marxist theories of the state to encompass women. With the capitalist state as the point of departure, a feminist approach was articulated focusing on social reproduction, gender and the family. The analysis showed how the capitalist state

produced patriarchal relations, although gender domination was seen above all as functional to capitalism (Pringle and Watson 2004: 207-8). While in Marxist feminism the state is inherently capitalistic in a capitalist society, socialist feminists have developed a notion of the state which combines the analysis of radical feminism with Marxism, and emphasizes the dual system of patriarchal gender oppression and capitalist class oppression (Kantola 2006: 8). On the whole, these approaches emphasize the oppressive aspects of the state, which also implies scepticism among feminists about working within state institutions (Pringle and Watson 2004: 208).

From a perspective of radical feminism, the state is not contingently but essentially patriarchal. Radical feminism emphasizes the role of the state in perpetuating gender inequality and criticizes the idea that the state can promote the interests of any group that mobilizes its political demands (Bustelo 2004). Independently of the legislation that is adopted and the women that achieve public positions, the state is inherently patriarchal and reflects, promotes, sustains and responds to the hierarchy of masculine domination and feminine subordination (McBride and Mazur 1995). The focus is not on political institutions as in liberal feminism but on the wider structures of the state and society, and the presumption is that the structure of male domination must be suppressed in order to attain women's emancipation. For this, it is civil society that needs to engage in struggles against patriarchy rather than the state. Women's specific engagements in politics and women's voice are celebrated and re-valued (Kantola 2006: 6). This strand of feminism has introduced issues like reproduction, violence and sexuality into studies of the state.

In *Toward a feminist theory of the state* (1989) radical feminist and legal theorist Catherine MacKinnon criticizes liberal and Marxist perspectives of the state. She claims that feminists have oscillated between a liberal theory of the state, which treats the law as disembodied reason, and a Marxist theory, which treats the law as a reflection of material interest. Liberal approaches accept the state as a neutral arbiter among conflicting interests which turns women into an interest group within pluralism, with specific problems of mobilization, representation, and voice. In Marxist approaches the state becomes a tool of capitalist dominance and repression and the law reflects ideology (MacKinnon 1989: 159-60). In contrast, MacKinnon asserts that "the state is male in a feminist sense: the law sees and treats women the way men see and treat women" (ibid. 161-2). In other words, the rule of law and the rule of men are the same indivisible thing and male power is systematic, coercive and legitimated. State power is embodied in the law and exists throughout society as male power; and at the same time, the power of men over women throughout society is organized as the power of the state. The liberal state coercively constitutes the social order in the interest of men through its legitimating norms and policies. The state, through the law, institutionalizes male power over women through institutionalizing the male point of view. The law promotes the dominance of men as a social group through privileging male forms of power, based on norms of objectivity and rationality. According to MacKinnon, the laws on rape, abortion and sex discrimination reveal the relation between women's subordination and objectification, and the power of the state (ibid. 161-70). To make gender equality⁷ meaningful it is necessary to identify the *real* issues involved in women's subordination. These are issues related to sexuality; like sexual abuse of girls in families, domestic violence, sexual

⁷ MacKinnon uses the term sex equality but I chose to refer to gender equality which is the concept used generally in this study.

harassment, rape, prostitution and pornography. She argues that these problems have been virtually excluded from mainstream policies on gender equality because they happen almost exclusively to women. At the same time, the state cannot represent women as long as society is patriarchal (ibid. 239-43). A first step in order to change the relationship between women and the state would be to define equality based on women's experiences.

Without a doubt, there have been criticisms towards Marxist and radical accounts of the state. Some have seen a problem in that Marxist feminists privilege Marxist categories of analysis over the feminist ones in focusing on the omnipotent capitalist system. The state reflects economic relations that exist outside the state, regarding economic relations as determinant. Moreover, socialist feminism has been criticized for not being able to grasp social change within the dominant dual system of patriarchy and capitalism. Critics of the radical feminist perspective of the state have rejected the idea of one single cause of women's oppression found in the exploitative structure of patriarchy. As MacKinnon theorizes on the essentially patriarchal nature of the state, she argues that the law institutionalizes masculine interests, and masculinity of the state is a reflection of the patriarchal society. The state is here understood as a key source of power, and power, in turn, is understood as men's authority and domination over women. This perspective claims that the state is repressive to all women in the same manner (Kantola 2006: 9). It becomes difficult to envision how this patriarchal state could be challenged, when women are victims of an all-encompassing patriarchal system (Pringle and Watson 2004: 212-3). Furthermore, criticism has been directed towards the idea of the state as monolithic, an objective existence with a set of institutions and structures that operate as a unity with a set of coherent interests (ibid. 205). A different perspective, which rejects the homogenous and unitary state and emphasizes its differentiated nature, will be presented next.

3.1.3 Post-structural perspectives on the state: both empowering and disempowering

My approach to the welfare state draws upon the theoretical contributions of a third approach: post-structural accounts of the state. The post-structural perspectives on the state can be linked to the strategy of displacement. The strategy of displacement involves destabilizing of the apparent opposition between the strategies of inclusion and reversal, often advocating politics of diversity (Squires 1999: 4-5). Post-structural feminism emphasizes that the state is not monolithic and can have both differentiated and contradictory effects. Researchers have highlighted the differences both *between* and *within* states, drawing attention to particular national contexts (Kantola and Dahl 2005). Post-structural approaches are concerned with multiplicity of meaning. The state is understood as a differentiated set of institutions, agencies and discourses, and the analytical focus lies on state practices and discourses rather than on institutions. (Kantola 2006: 12-3).

Adopting a post-structural approach to the state, Wendy Brown views the state as a "significantly unbounded terrain of powers and techniques, an ensemble of discourses,

rules, and practices, cohabiting in limited, tension-ridden, often contradictory relation with one another” (Brown 1992: 12). From this point of view, neither state power nor male dominance is unitary, and the task is to map the different and often conflictive discourses of power. In a similar vein, Rosemary Pringle and Sofie Watson (2004: 205) see the state, not as an actor or object, but a plurality of arenas and discourses. The set of practices and discourses that construct the state is a historical product and not structurally given. Pringle and Watson draw upon Foucault’s notion of power: power is not imposed from the top of a social hierarchy or derived from an opposition between rulers and the ruled – power is relational and operating at all levels. The state is an effect of all these power relations and, thereby, cannot be assumed to be a coherent agent of particular groups.

In this approach, instead of regarding the state as inherently patriarchal, it is seen as a set of power relations and political processes in which patriarchy is constantly constructed and contested (Kantola 2006: 12). Consequently, this approach does not claim *a priori* that the state will act uniformly to maintain capitalist or patriarchal relations, or that this is its purpose. The outcome of particular policies will not only depend on the limits established by structures, but also on the discursive struggles which define and constitute the state within a certain timeframe (Pringle and Watson 2004: 213). Rather than theorizing on gender and the state in general terms, the focus falls upon the construction of gender in specific state discourses. When state discourses and practices are in focus, this allows for an analysis of gender diversity, and the state can be seen as potentially having both empowering and disempowering effects (Kantola and Dahl 2005). In other words, the state can have both negative and positive effects on women since the relationship between gender and the state is complex and multiple (Kantola 2006: 13). State discourses and practices may work to privilege or exclude certain gender, class and ethnic groups in different ways, to structure their relationship to each other and give differential political power to different groups (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1984: 67). This means taking into account the contradictions of state policies and practices; while some practices and institutions produce inequality, others may have potentially empowering effects (Bustelo 2004: 211).

Post-structural perspectives on the state have been criticized for lacking attention to state institutions in their strong focus on discourse and multiple meanings. Thereby, they have been regarded as somewhat naïve, underestimating the difficulties of achieving social change. They have also been said to disregard the linkages between state institutions, mainly the influence of central governments over regional and local governments. Some feminists have been especially sceptical about post-structural accounts of gender, considering it dangerous to see the categories of women and men as variable social constructs lacking coherence and stability, because a common identity is seen as necessary for women’s mobilization (Kantola 2006:13-4). Nevertheless, as we have seen in chapter 3, the ideas of a common identity and a unified subject of feminism have also been powerfully contested.

The present study views the state as a differentiated set of institutions, policies and practices which can be grasped by means of an analysis of discursive construction of meanings. Importantly, the analysis recognizes and pays attention to both differences within states and between states. The approach emphasizes the importance of language and discourse in constituting social reality (Pringle and Watson 2004: 214). Following

from this, the study I develop here emphasizes the importance of language in constituting the social world, and I analyze state discourses to map the different ways of representing gender inequality as a policy problem. The analysis of state discourses emphasizes intersectionality and assumes that the state can have differentiated effects on women (and men). My argument is that the state cannot be seen as *a priori* “women-friendly” or “unfriendly”, but in-depth empirical studies can help us understand how specific public policies constitute gender and assess what effects such constructions may have on women. I am interested in the ways in which policy debates privilege certain groups of women and men while excluding or marginalizing others. I am also interested in the ways in which policy debates construct the welfare state as “women-friendly” (or not).

Feminist theories on the welfare state, particularly the approaches derived from Nordic feminists, have involved an optimistic view of the state and its capacity to promote women’s interests. In the next sections I will explore (mainly) European comparative feminist welfare state theories and the articulation of a “women-friendly” caring state as opposed to the strong male breadwinner regime.

3.2 Gender and the welfare state: comparative perspectives

The welfare state has been considered a central institution in the construction of gendered power relations, and feminist re-workings and critiques of mainstream welfare state typologies have stimulated substantial literature (Sainsbury 2000, 1999; O’Conner et al. 1999; Daly 1994; Lewis 1993; Orloff 1993). Next, I will discuss some of the contributions of feminist welfare state studies to mainstream approaches to the welfare states, particularly the incorporation of unpaid work and care into the analysis. After that I will explore the normative foundations that can be found in gender and welfare state research. Given the exclusionary norms on gender (in)equality in comparative feminist welfare state research, I will propose to develop a feminist welfare state analysis that enables an examination of normative subjects and exclusion in public policies.

3.2.1 Mainstream welfare state studies and feminist contributions

Feminist welfare state studies have criticized mainstream welfare state research for ignoring gender or being “gender-blind”. Diane Sainsbury underlines that “the feminist research paradigms have sought to bring women and gender into the picture” (2000: 2). She argues that two alternative approaches have emerged among feminist scholars (Sainsbury 1999; 2000). On the one hand, scholars have integrated gender into the mainstream theoretical frameworks. On the other hand, scholars have approached the issue with the idea that it is problematic to “add women” to the frameworks where the male is the norm and, hence, they have attempted to develop alternative models to understand the dynamics of gender and welfare.

Within the first approach, researchers have attempted to incorporate gender into sociologist Gøsta Esping-Andersen’s work *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*

(1990). Esping-Andersen's theory of the welfare state establishes three dimensions of variation in welfare regimes⁸: a) the nexus of the state and the market in the distribution system, b) the quality of social rights as reflected in the notion of *decommodification*, i.e., the ability to earn a livelihood without reliance on the market, and c) the stratifying effects of welfare entitlements. Esping-Andersen identifies three different welfare state regimes: the Liberal, the Conservative-Corporatist and the Social Democratic regime. The Liberal regime is characterized by work-ethics norms and a minimized state. The means-tested assistance and modest benefits aim to compensate for labour market failures for the poor working class. Entitlement rules are strict and often associated with stigma. At the same time, private, market-based social insurance is available for the middle class. This regime refers to the Anglo-Saxon countries, United States, Canada and Australia. In the Conservative-Corporatist regime the liberal market orientation and work ethics have not dominated and, thus, granting social rights has not been a strongly contested issue. What prevails is status maintenance and differentiation achieved through the collaboration between the state, employers' organizations and trade unions. Rights are attached to class and status, and the state's redistributive impact is insignificant. Conservative welfare states are shaped by the Church and committed to the preservation of the traditional family. The state will only intervene when the family's capacities to service and maintain family members are exhausted. This regime includes Austria, France and Italy, but Esping-Andersen has argued in his later work that Spain would also be included. Sweden embodies the third regime; the Social Democratic regime is characterized by universal benefits and social rights based on citizenship and financed by taxes. There is an emphasis on full employment and the level of benefits and services is high for the "needy" as well as for the middle and upper class; policies promote equality at the highest standard and not of minimal needs. Social Democracy has been the dominant force behind social reform and there is high solidarity in favour of the welfare state. The ideal is not family dependency but individual autonomy. The welfare state takes responsibility for child and elderly care and promotes women's participation in the labour market (Esping-Andersen 1990: 26-8).

Ann Orloff's (1993) critique of Esping-Andersen's model emphasizes its failure to incorporate gender into the three central dimensions of its analysis. In order to re-work the regimes she modifies the state-market dimension of variation by looking at the nexus between state, market and *family* relations; a modification that recognizes the role of women's unpaid work in social provision. Orloff has tried to overcome the gender blindness of the concept decommodification by looking at women's access to paid work (commodification) and the capacity to form and maintain an autonomous household. In relation to stratification, she distinguishes between gender differentiation and gender inequality. Gender differentiation occurs when benefits are based on the traditional sexual division of labour: men receive benefits as workers and breadwinners and women as wives, mothers and caregivers. Gender inequality refers to differences in benefit levels of women and men, which is often an effect of gender differentiation since benefits tied to labour force participation are usually more generous than benefits claimed on the basis of homemaking and mothering.

⁸ "Regime" generally refers to the way states cluster around similar institutional policies and practices and policy logics (Williams and Gavanas 2008: 15).

On the other hand, researchers have argued that it is necessary to elaborate alternative models to mainstream welfare state analysis. Feminist scholars have shown that gender relations cut across the three welfare state regimes because the state-family nexus is different from the state-market relationship. Extensive literature has made an effort to show how and to what extent gender is inscribed in welfare states in a way that enhances the norm of the male breadwinner and female caretaker. Jane Lewis's (1992) breadwinner model exposes the normative prescription of the sexual division of labour in welfare policies. Along with Orloff's ideas, she criticizes Esping-Andersen's work on the basis that it overlooks one of the central issues in structuring welfare state regimes: the unpaid care and domestic work performed primarily by women to provide welfare. Thereby, women disappear from the analysis when they disappear from the labour market. The concept of decommodification is problematic because for women this is likely to result in their carrying out unpaid care work. As a response to the criticism, Esping-Andersen introduced in his later work the concept of de-familialization, referring to policies that diminish individuals' reliance on the family. The concept pays attention to the degree to which the households', and thereby women's, care responsibilities are relieved through public or market provision (Esping-Andersen 1999: 45). Overall, the significance of the family and gender relations has increasingly been recognized in mainstream comparative welfare state research.

Feminist research has brought care into welfare state studies and, thereby, broadened the analytical focus compared to the mainstream analysis which has tended to centre on social insurance and income maintenance policies (Sainsbury 2000: 2). All welfare states position themselves in relation to the political location of care work: how it should be performed, by whom and where (Sundström 2003). Mary Daly's (2000) synthesis of the main approaches of gender and welfare state literature identifies "care" and "breadwinner models" (where care is also central) as two fundamental subject matters of analysis, together with the focus on citizenship. Current policies surrounding care provide a useful lens through which we can understand processes of change in European welfare states (Daly and Lewis 1999). As Fiona Williams asserts, care has become increasingly significant in discourses surrounding the welfare state, linked to issues of (good) parenting, care for the elderly and work/life balance (2001: 471). Drawing upon these arguments of the importance of analyzing care within welfare state research, my case studies explore specific policy debates surrounding care and domestic work.

3.2.2 Gender and care regimes

This study takes a comparative perspective. Contrasting the Spanish and the Swedish case studies is useful in order to get a better understanding of how gender inequality is framed in the context of European welfare states in change. Nonetheless, the analysis challenges studies that elaborate typologies and wide generalizations across welfare states and that set a specific type of welfare state as the ideal. I argue that in-depth empirical case studies are particularly useful as a basis for comparison. Welfare state change needs to be understood in the light of specific national contexts. I analyze Spain

and Sweden, indeed often seen as representatives of “opposite” welfare state models. But the focus is not only on differences; rather, the analysis explores the normative assumptions that are shared across welfare state regimes and the context-bound silences. The analysis centres upon the representation of gender inequality in the politics of care. In contrast to the attempts to formulate a coherent and all-encompassing notion of care, I here contend that, from the point of view of the analysis of problem representations, understandings of care are multiple, context-related and may also be contradictory. Hence, it is more relevant to analyze the construction of meanings surrounding care (and domestic work) in specific contexts (Dahl 2000: 82). Below I will discuss the contributions of the research on gender and care regimes and argue in favour of contrasting case studies.

Jane Lewis’s gender-specific typology is based on an examination of the organizing logics of welfare states from a gender perspective, looking at the content and design of social policies and highlighting the assumptions on women’s roles that lie embedded in the welfare policies. The focus falls mainly on how women have been treated in the social security system, the level of social service provision, particularly child care, and married women’s position in the labour market. Western European welfare states have been compared on the basis of whether they recognize and provide for women as wives, mothers or workers. Three types of welfare states are identified. *Strong breadwinner states* tend to distinguish firmly between public and private responsibility and to define married women as dependent wives for the purpose of social entitlements. Lewis argues that the United Kingdom can be characterized as a strong male breadwinner state, but Spain has often been described in these terms too (see chapter 5). This implies a low participation of women in the labour market and it is assumed that the family, that is women, will provide child care. In *moderate breadwinner states* women have gained entitlements as both citizen workers and citizen mothers. Female labour market participation is encouraged but policies are also strongly supportive of families (e.g., France). *Weak breadwinner states* are characterized by the norm of the two-breadwinner family, and women as well as men are treated as citizen workers. This type has also been conceptualized as a dual earner model. Sweden is the example that Lewis refers to here. The breadwinner model has been developed as a widely adopted instrument for comparative analysis and has generated many studies on the differences and similarities between countries and welfare state regimes.

There have also been attempts to develop a comparative analysis on the basis of care regimes. These studies analyze different caring cultures and ways of packaging paid and unpaid, family and non-family, public and private modes of providing care in Western welfare states. Anttonen and Sipilä (1996) distinguish between four different care regimes, closely related to the participation of women in the labour market in Western Europe. The models that contrast most clearly are the *Nordic model of social care* and the *Mediterranean model of family care*. The Nordic model of social care is based on public provision of care services, including child care and elderly care, and women’s employment rates are among the highest in Europe. Care services are provided on the basis of the principle of universal rights and local governments have a key role in financing and providing for care service. In the mid 1990s market-provided care services were generally inexistent but have increased significantly since then. The family care model dominating in Spain, Italy, Portugal and Greece generally involves a limited state

responsibility in care provision, but there are also significant variations across countries and regions. Care is mainly provided by the family and within informal markets. Well-off families use the services of the private sector. Women's employment rates are low but women are usually inserted in full-time employment and not part-time. There are also models that are represented as in between the social care model and the family care model; the *British model* involves services based on need and the *Central European model* is based on family responsibility in elderly care and more but varying state responsibility in child care (Anttonen 2005: 14).

In a similar vein, Mary Daly (2001: 45) has also worked on identifying care regimes and she distinguishes between *caring states* (the Nordic countries), *pro-family caring states* (Austria, Belgium, Germany, France and the Netherlands), *hot and cold states* (Ireland, Great Britain and Italy) and *non-caring states* (Spain, Portugal and Greece). The caring state involves public care provision based on social citizenship. In pro-family caring states the state assumes a limited responsibility in care provision and assigns the responsibility of care work to the family. The hot and cold states generally have more developed care provision for the elderly and disabled than child care. The fourth category, the non-caring state, attributes responsibility of care to the family, including the extensive family, while public care provision is very scarce.

Comparative studies that use typologies have been criticized for overgeneralizations and lack of understanding of change and transformation of welfare states. Mary Daly and Jane Lewis (1999) elaborate on the concept of *social care* as a notion, which they argue is useful for comparative welfare state studies. They favour a comparative approach based on country case studies, which permits analysis of change and takes into account specific national contexts. By setting social care in focus, Daly and Lewis draw attention to the ways in which different countries' welfare states endorse and respond to: the shifting relations between the state, family, market and voluntary sectors as providers of care, the shifting relations between cash benefits and services as a mode of care provision, the shifting relations between the carers and the cared for, shifting gender relations and shifting demographic relations through which care has become a central welfare concern. Daly and Lewis reject gendered dichotomies that have informed studies on care: informal/formal care sectors, child care vs. elderly care, paid vs. unpaid work. They argue that these dichotomies cast doubt on the coherence of the concept of care and its capacity to embrace comprehensively a major part of welfare state activity (1999: 6). To overcome this fragmentation they suggest that studies on care include both child care and elderly care, both care as a social phenomenon and carers as a social group. While many studies have opted for analyzing only one type of care, child care or elderly care, Daly and Lewis include both in their concept of social care because they both have important gendered implications.

I agree that in-depth empirical case studies are particularly useful as a basis for comparison and to understand change in the light of specific national contexts as well. At the same time, I draw upon gender and welfare state regimes to argue that it is interesting to compare Spain and Sweden as they often are taken as representatives of opposite welfare state models. This does not mean that my focus is only on differences between these two countries and regimes; rather, I aim to analyze similarities and differences between the countries as well as differences within them. I am interested in discursive convergences on the issue of gender inequality: What are the normative assumptions that

are shared across welfare state regimes? This study analyzes different forms of care; it compares child care, as articulated in the debate on reconciliation of work and family life, elderly care, as articulated in the debate on dependent care, and domestic (care) service. But, in contrast to Daly and Lewis, I do not aim at or argue for a coherent notion of care; I argue that we need to analyze the construction of meanings surrounding care and domestic work in specific contexts.

3.3 Normative foundations: the caring “women-friendly” welfare state

The context in which studies emerge is important insofar as it informs the normative assumptions of the adopted framework. The development of different traditions of care research can be understood as located within different contexts and particularly in different welfare state regimes, which implies different views on state responsibility in care work (Dahl 2000: 82). As an example, feminist theory on care can be divided into a British and a Nordic tradition with different perspectives and normative ideals (Dahl 2000; Lehto 1999; Rose 1994; Thomas 1993). While British research has focused on care from the point of view of the care provider, Nordic research has focused on both the caregiver and the care-receiver. In the British literature the implicit ideal has been home-based unpaid family care, while in the Nordic studies the ideal tends to depend on the kind of care in focus, but it includes paid care work within the public sector. Where there is solidarity between carers and the cared for in much of the Nordic literature, the British has been marked by a strong voice of middle-aged, middle-class women who are confronted with the prospect of caring for their elderly parents. Both British and Nordic literature have represented unpaid caring as a problem for white women. It was primarily in the US where the literature by black and post-colonial feminists began to grapple with the intersection of gender and race in domestic (care) work (Rose 1994: 41). It was also in this context that researchers started to focus on the phenomenon of “global care chains”. In the following sections I set out to examine the normative assumptions within (mainly) European gender and welfare state research. I am interested in what such normative assumptions reveal about the nature of the welfare state: good or bad for women?

3.3.1 Women-friendly Nordic welfare states - and women-unfriendly Southern European welfare states

Despite recognizing the importance of the context, European comparative feminist welfare studies often coincide in conceptualizing a certain type of welfare state as generally better for women. The models assumed to be more “women-friendly” are those models where the state widely assumes responsibility for care provision, associated with theoretical models such as the “dual breadwinner model” (Lewis, 1992), the “Nordic

model of social care” (Anttonen 2005) and the “caring state” (Daly, 2001). Indeed, the idea of a women-friendly welfare state is closely linked to social policy (Hobson 2004; Anttonen 2002; Sörensen and Bergqvist 2002). The notion of the women-friendly welfare state has come to refer, to a large extent, to the possibilities of combining employment and care.

The positive view of the welfare state diverges from Marxist and radical approaches to the state in that it adopts a positive view on the relationship between women and the state. The notion of the women-friendly welfare state contrasts with the tendency in Anglo-American feminist literature to highlight the patriarchal aspects of welfare states (Kantola 2006: 9). Research that starts from the idea of patriarchal relations as embodied by the welfare state emphasizes the control and regulatory functions of the state and how these are exercised over women. Scholars critical towards this view have argued that the focus on the patriarchal state ignores other forms of power and blurs the potential emancipatory effect of the welfare state on women (Daly and Rake 2003: 20).

The Nordic welfare states have frequently been represented as women-friendly and Nordic feminists have strongly contributed to the idea of the women-friendly welfare state⁹. Nordic feminist research has focused on the process of social reproduction going public and social policy has been conceived as the embodiment of the women-friendliness of welfare states (Kantola and Dahl 2005). The “social reproduction going public” was a central aspect of Helga Maria Hernes’ conceptualization of the women-friendly welfare state¹⁰ in her work *Welfare State and Woman Power* (1987). Hernes defines the Nordic states as potentially women-friendly, meaning that women’s empowerment goes through the state¹¹ and with the support from social policy (Kantola 2006: 11). However, there have also been different views and some Nordic feminist scholars have seen women’s entrance in public care work as representing a form of public patriarchy, as women continue doing the work that they have traditionally done in the home (Borchorst and Siim 1987). Overall, though, comparative research seems to widely agree on that welfare state services have an immense significance for the distribution of women’s time between care and work and, thus, for gender equality too (Daly and Rake 2003: 13). Social service provision has been considered of disproportionate importance to women because of the sexual division of labour, whereby women do most of the unpaid work of caring. Daly and Lewis argue that collectively provided services have been important, “both in helping women to perform as well as in relieving them of this work” (1999: 2). The normative assumption of the women-friendly welfare state can be said to be a shared element within mainstream and feminist welfare state studies. There is a certain convergence around the thesis that in contexts where the state effectively transfers the “private” duty of care to the public the conditions for the development of full civil, political and social citizenship for women are better fulfilled. From this perspective, it is not surprising that the Nordic Social Democratic type of

⁹ Nordic feminist welfare state research has also questioned the existence of a Nordic model and emphasized the differences between the Nordic countries (see chapter 6).

¹⁰ For an analysis of the formation of the category “women” in academic work on the women-friendly welfare state in the 1980s, see Livholts 2001.

¹¹ State feminism is therefore an essential part of the “women-friendly” welfare state. Women “in the state” are influential policy makers; hence, women are not just receivers of social policy.

welfare state most often has come to figure as the norm for many comparative studies (Bussemaker and Kees van Kersbergen 2000: 17). The Nordic countries have thus tended to provide the ideal model which involves high employment rates for women and generous provision of diversified social policies (Tobío 2001: 340).

Nancy Fraser (1997) evaluates three different visions of a “women-friendly” welfare state: the *universal breadwinner model* (linked to gender equality and the strategy of inclusion), the *care parity model* (linked to gender difference and the strategy of reversal) and the *universal caregiver model*. She argues in favour of a third vision: the universal caregiver model, linked to the strategy of displacement, with associations to the Nordic welfare state. The universal breadwinner model is based on the employment principle as the norm and supports women as citizen-workers. The model would organize care work in a way that shifts focus from the family to the market and the state, where care work would be performed by employees for pay. Fraser assesses some of the shortcomings of this vision and one important point is that any employment-centred model has difficulties in constructing a respectable status for those defined as “non-workers”; by valorizing paid work, it implicitly devalues unpaid work. The caregiver-parity model promotes gender equality by supporting women as citizen-carers aiming to make gender differences costless. The model would support informal care work to enable women to support themselves and their families either through care work alone or through care work and part-time employment. A critical aspect of this model is that the support to informal work reinforces the construction of care as women’s work and, thereby, consolidates the sexual division of labour. By reinforcing the association of care with femininity, it marginalizes women in the employment sector as well as in other spheres of life: the political and civil society.

Fraser argues that “a third possibility is to induce men to become more like most women are now, namely, people who do primarily care work” (1997: 60). The universal caregiver model attempts to transcend the two previous models. The key to achieving gender equality is “to make women’s current life patterns as the norm for everyone” (1997: 61). Women often combine breadwinning and caregiving although with great difficulties. Fraser argues that the welfare state must ensure that men do the same while redesigning institutions to eliminate the difficulties. This model would imply that all jobs would be designed for workers who are also carers, hence involving a shorter workweek than today’s fulltime jobs. Workers would not be expected to shift all care work to social services, given that some informal care work would also be publicly supported. Some care work would be performed in the household by family and friends and some would be performed by state-funded and locally organized institutions. Childless adults, older people, and others without kin-based responsibility would join parents in democratic, self-managed care work activities. The gendered opposition between breadwinning and caregiving would be displaced. Fraser adverts that this would require a total restructuring of the current gender order, subverting the existing sexual division of labour and reducing gender as a structuring principle in social organization. Even though this is all a “utopian vision”, Fraser herself refers to a statement from the Swedish Ministry of Labour to give a good example of the “universal caregiver model”: “To make it possible for both men and women to combine parenthood and gainful employment a new view of the male role and a radical change in the organization of working life are required” (1997: 62).

In sum, the universal breadwinner model involves a strategy that provides services to facilitate employment such as work training and public child and elderly care. The caregiver-parity model aims to equalize the way employment and care are rewarded through state provision of care allowances. The universal caregiver model sets out to transform the sexual division of labour so that men and women can equally combine caregiving and breadwinning. This has also been referred to as the earner-carer strategy; the women-friendly welfare state is linked to the way in which the state enables women and men to be earners and carers (Sainsbury 1999).

I have focused on the normative ideal often embedded in gender and welfare state research, and so I turn to the women-unfriendly welfare state. In European comparative welfare state research the opposite of the women-friendly caring welfare can be found in the models that are associated with Spain and, more generally, with Southern Europe, conceptualized as “strong male breadwinner states”, “non-caring states” and the “family care model”. Here the state widely attributes responsibility of care to the family, including the extensive family, while public care provision is very scarce. Hence, studies highlight the differences between welfare states in Southern and Northern Europe and, thus, between Spain and Sweden. Without a doubt, as the Nordic welfare states have set the norm for comparative welfare state research, the Southern European welfare states have been seen as lagging behind.

In the Nordic welfare states women’s empowerment has been said to go through social policy and public care provision. The “dual breadwinner model”, or “earner-carer model”, implies that both women and men are entitled to be carers and earners and that the aim of public policies has been to enable women to become workers and men to become caregivers. Like other Southern European countries, the Spanish welfare state has been characterized as a strong male breadwinner model with an ideology of sexual division of labour according to the norm of male breadwinner/female caretaker (Daly 2000). It is characterized by a high degree of familialization, given that the welfare state assigns important responsibilities to the family unit (León 2002). Feminist scholars have strongly criticized the fact that the state assigns a key role to women’s unpaid work within the family (Threlfall, Cousins and Valiente 2005; Carrasco et al. 1997). While care services are marginal, the state counts on the family as a crucial institution to secure citizens’ welfare, and women are (re)produced as responsible for caretaking.

Recent studies indicate that the expectations on women’s unpaid work within the family are unsustainable. Spain has been said to be shifting towards a “dual earner model” in the context of an increasing participation of women in the labour market and new policies that promote an increasing participation of men in child care. Nevertheless, in the context of an ageing population and new migration patterns, “private” care provision is still dominant although shifting in character (see Lister 2007; Martínez Buján 2007). In the next section I will scrutinize the exclusionary norms often embedded in gender and welfare state research.

3.4 Exclusionary norms of gender (in)equality

Comparative feminist welfare state research can be criticized for not sufficiently taking into consideration differences among women (and men), marginalizing divisions related to class, race/ethnicity, and sexuality. The ideal model, the universal caregiver model wants to make women's current life patterns the norm. We might then ask: what "women" would set the norm? I will here examine the ways in which gender and welfare state studies often overlook the implications of the developments in feminist theory. Given the exclusionary norms, this study proposes to develop a feminist welfare state analysis that allows for an examination of the underlying normative assumptions of dominant discourses on gender (in)equality. While gender has been analyzed as the dominant system of social relations that shape care and domestic work, domestic service is a generally overlooked issue in welfare state studies emphasizing women's unpaid work in the family. The focus on women's unpaid care and domestic work performed in the home for their own families overshadows the work carried out by working class and migrant women. This motivates the inclusion of debates surrounding domestic service in the analysis, as a contrast to the more traditional issues treated within the welfare state literature: policies related to elderly care, child care and parenting. Below I will examine the exclusionary norms of gender inequality in welfare state research, both in the vision of the women-friendly welfare state and in the accounts of the women-unfriendly welfare state.

3.4.1 What about differences between women?

In gender and welfare state studies women are generally represented as a group that faces the same problems of care and domestic work and shares the same interests in politics of care. The adopted gender perspective has tended to focus on taking into account women's, or women and men's, different life situations and the way the welfare state constructs differences between women and men. Several scholars emphasize that a gender perspective means taking into account both "women" and "men". Diane Sainsbury focuses on how social policy affects the life situations of women and men across welfare states (2000: 7). Similarly, Mary Daly (2000b) argues that an analysis of the gendering of welfare states should encompass both women and men. She asserts that, in contrast to mainstream welfare studies which focus on the experience of men, feminist welfare state literature has focused on women; feminist studies have privileged the experience of women and their relationship to the state. Daly puts forward a definition of gender which understands gender as the structural, relational and symbolic differentiation between women and men. This implies focusing on the social relations between women and men, relations which are seen as socially constructed. Following from this, a gender perspective on the welfare state involves looking at the treatment and experiences of women and men and the role of the state in constructing female and male access to its resources. Daly highlights what she considers weaknesses in feminist welfare studies: "since its focus has been largely, if not exclusively, on women, the role

of welfare states in constructing systematic differences between women and men has been underplayed” (Daly 2000b:105). Together with Katherine Rake, Daly argues in favour of a gender analysis that compares “women” and “men”: “Although one can observe a movement in scholarship away from a women-only approach to one that conceives gender as a comparison between women and men, this movement remains partial, and many slip back into a women-only mode. For us a legitimate use of gender relations must include a male-female comparison” (Daly and Rake 2003: 38). Daly suggests that women interact with the state and are impacted by the state in a similar unified way, emphasizing that the nature of female and male interactions with the welfare state differs substantially.

So what about differences between women? The understanding of gender analysis as a comparison between women and men lacks an intersectional analysis. It presupposes that all women relate in the same way to the state and are affected in a similar manner by state policies and stand in contrast to men as a homogenous category. This notion does not consider differentiated relations between women and the (welfare) state linked to categories such as class, race/ethnicity, sexuality and citizenship/migrant status. Women and men remain stable and unified categories with the result that certain categories will be invisibilized in the analysis. While mainstream welfare state studies have prioritized the analysis of class, this category has had a more limited importance in the gender and welfare state studies. But class has clear implications with respect to the norm of the strong male breadwinner model. This model assumes that women provide unpaid care and domestic work in the private sphere and men earn money and achieve social benefits through labour market participation, but this normative assumption has ignored the social reality of working-class families where women always have preformed paid (although informal) work (Daly and Lewis 1999: 19). Moreover, dominant notions of gender bear an implicit heterosexual norm, which can be discerned in the focus on men and women, husbands and wives, and its unquestioned norm of the heterosexual nuclear family. Women are represented as depending economically on men; “the most important “source” of income for women as a group is the men with whom they are having intimate relations” (Daly 2000b: 108). The dual breadwinner model is said to allow women “a substantial degree of independence *vis-à-vis* their spouses by stimulating female labour market participation through the provision of public childcare and parental leave” (Bussemaker and Kees van Kersbergen 2000: 17).

Indeed, welfare state studies have often focused on women as a homogenous category. But there have also been developments towards more heterogeneous accounts and contextualized perspectives, drawing attention to fathers in caretaking, single mothers, non-heterosexual families and migrant women. A shift in welfare state studies focusing on care has implied an emphasis on the entitlements to men as caregivers, such as state support for fathers’ leaves (Hobson 2002). The research on men as caregivers and masculinities indicates a shift away from the focus on “working mothers”. The focus on single mothers has also showed great variations across regimes, challenging the male breadwinner model (Leira and Saraceno 2002: 71-2). The research that highlights the intersection of care and migration regimes reveals the interconnection between gender, class, race/ethnicity and citizenship status. I will discuss this in more depth in the next sections.

3.4.2 Exclusionary norms

As Judith Butler (1990) asserts, it is impossible to separate gender from the political and cultural intersections in which it is produced and maintained. The category “women” is at the same time normative and exclusionary and it is commonly invoked without challenging class or racial privilege. The unity of the category women obscures the multiplicity of cultural, social and political intersections in which the group of “women” is constructed and constituted. I argue that gender and welfare studies need to take into account the problems of taking a unitary notion of women for granted. For this, I draw upon some critical feminist accounts on gender and the welfare state.

In the last decade feminist researchers, and especially Nordic feminists, have criticized the normative assumptions embedded in the gender and welfare state literature (Lister 2009; Magnusson, Rönnblom and Silius 2008; Kantola 2006; Kantola and Dahl 2005; Hobson 2004; Borchorst and Siim 2002; Livholtz 2001). It has been disputed for lacking an understanding of gender diversity and producing a rosy image of the Nordic welfare state (Kantola and Dahl 2005). The idea of the women-friendly welfare state rests on a problematic view on women’s interests as common and collective and different from the interests of men (Borchorst and Siim 2002). Nordic feminist welfare state research had tended to claim that all women are liberated through the state in the same way and women are represented as a homogenous category. Gender equality in the Nordic welfare state is still often associated with equality for white, heterosexual, working mothers (Kantola 2006; Hobson 2004). As Annette Borchorst and Birte Siim contend, the women-friendly welfare state approach is most often linked to equality as sameness and based on the norm of the dual earner model where both women and men are waged workers. Hence, the approach puts forward the premise of women’s labour market participation as the key to gender equality (Borchorst and Siim 2002). The “ethics of paid work” reflected in the notion of paid work associated with emancipation, autonomy, self-realization and choice can be argued to reflect the experience of relatively privileged women. Drucilla Barker asserts: “paid employment is crucially important to women’s well-being. But as feminist scholars, being in positions of relative power and privilege, we need to look on the sudden convergence of feminist interests with the interests of global capitalism...Our complicity would be in advancing the global feminization of labour¹².” (Barker 2005: 2202). The women-friendly welfare state as the norm is also problematic given that it assumes a non-repressive state and privileges social policy as a mechanism to produce equality while it eclipses issues related to civil rights, such as the right to bodily integrity and freedom from violence. The Nordic countries have in fact been latecomers in the struggle against men’s violence against women (Lister 2009; Kantola 2006; Kantola and Dahl 2005).

Also the strong male breadwinner model, associated with the Southern European (implicitly women-unfriendly) welfare state, builds upon exclusionary norms in conceptualizing the problem of gender inequality. It considers the problem of gender inequality to be mainly a problem of white, middle-class, heterosexual, “non-working” mothers. The male breadwinner and female caretaker norm has to be understood as an

¹² With feminization of labour Drucilla Barker refers to the global process of converting all labour into conditions of “female labour”, implying low-wage job lacking job security. Hence, the concept goes beyond the increase of women in paid labour.

ideal, which primarily corresponds to relatively well-off families. Poor and working-class women have had to engage in income-generating work in formal and informal sectors. Julia O'Connor, Ann Shola Orloff and Sheila Shaver (1999) underline that public policies sometimes encourage mothering in the home and breadwinning for men for a privileged race/ethnicity or class, while refusing other groups such support. In a similar vein, Fiona Williams (1995) points at the link between the strong breadwinner model and race/ethnicity; in the context of the hegemony of the "white breadwinner model" certain groups get constructed as "other" on the basis of a supposed racial, ethnic or cultural difference.

Gender has been analyzed as the dominant system of social relations that shape care and domestic work. While feminist researchers have pointed out that the ideology and practice of informal care reinforce the sexual division of labour, these studies can be said to articulate the interests and concerns of white, middle-class women, treating racial divisions as structures that only affect black women. Domestic (care) service is a generally overlooked issue in welfare state studies, which have often centred on women's unpaid work in the family¹³. Hilary Graham (1991) emphasizes non-kin forms of domestic work and home-based care in order to grasp the intersections of class and race alongside of gender. The focus on women's unpaid care and domestic work performed in the home for their own families overshadows the work carried out by women of colour for and in white families. Graham emphasizes the colonial roots of domestic service; black women's lives have been shaped historically by a colonial labour system, which means that for many black women their work in other households has subjugated the needs of their own families. It is the absence rather than the presence of a clearly defined private sphere that has shaped their experiences of care. The boundaries between private and public become ambiguous when home becomes work, and work becomes home (1991: 68-9). This critique motivates the inclusion of debates surrounding domestic service in the empirical study, providing a significant contrast to the more traditional issues treated within the welfare state literature: policies related to elderly care, child care and parenting.

3.5 European welfare states in change

Since the 1990s care has become important for the political agenda in many Western European welfare states (Leira and Saraceno 2002). Scholars have highlighted that the changes in the European welfare states have involved a general shift from the male breadwinner towards a dual earner model¹⁴, assuming women's involvement in the labour market as the norm (Lister et. al. 2007; Hobson 2004; Sundström 2003; Lewis 2001). The shift towards a dual earner model, the ageing populations and the scarce welfare provision have lead European gender and welfare state scholars to speak about a "care crisis". The narrative of the care deficit can be regarded as a feminist counter-

¹³ Graham's critique is particularly directed against British feminist welfare state studies.

¹⁴ I do not use the concept of adult-worker model because public policies often enhance the norm of the family with two providers, mainly associated with a man and a woman. The empirical analysis shows how two-earner heterosexual families have been taken as the norm.

discourse to accounts emphasizing the need for welfare state entrenchment or modernization (Dahl 2005). Care is seen as threatened due to the decline of informal family-based care and the limitations or withdrawal of the welfare state. This may seem like a longing for past times, but the idea is important in order to emphasize the shifting social organization of care and domestic work. Issues of family care, care going public and commodification of care are highly relevant questions in recent policy debates. In the context of privatization of welfare state services, the private/public divide often refers to the relationship between the state and the market, rather than the relationship between the state and the family. The notion of commodification of care has shifted in meaning, referring less to paying for care or being paid for care work and more to the marketization of care services, which in turn is linked to the restructuring or retrenchment of the welfare state (Leira and Saraceno 2002: 68, 74).

In the Western European context there has been a process of EU states embracing neo-liberal policies and social policy being increasingly subordinated to the demands of maintaining competitiveness and the promotion of “flexible” labour markets (Walby 1999). Policies in the European Union have tended to stress the importance of employment and women’s labour market participation has been prioritized over care-related needs (Saraceno 2008). The issue of “reconciliation of work and family life” has become a salient one in Europe. The European Union has been particularly influential in shaping such policies in its member states. In the context of the European Union, the concept of reconciliation of work and family life was introduced in the 1970s and was linked to the idea of sharing responsibilities in productive and reproductive work between women and men. Nevertheless, it has gradually become associated with employment strategies and liberal market solutions and less with the problem of gender inequality (Williams 2010; Hrženjak 2007; Stratigaki 2004). As Fiona Williams argues, dominant policy discourses have elevated the ethics of work, not the ethics of care (Williams 2010: 17). EU policies and national policies surrounding care have been framed within a discourse on social investment, emphasizing employment, global competitiveness, and the problems of ageing populations and low birth rates (ibid. 3-4). The modernization of welfare state provision has involved cash payment and tax credits for care moving away from state provision. States subsidize the care families provide through cash-for-care schemes and the norm of “freedom of choice” legitimizes such policies (Lutz 2008: 5). Cash benefits or tax credits for care encourage the development of a particular form of home-based care, often market-provided, low-paid care or domestic help (Williams and Gavanas 2008: 14).

It is in this context that migrant workers become an important asset of welfare provision. Next, I will focus on the interconnection between gender and care regimes with migration regimes. Then I will explain how the welfare state in this study is analyzed by means of an examination of normative subjects and exclusion in public policy. I develop the concept of political intersectionality, as such, for the purpose of a feminist welfare state analysis.

3.5.1 Intersecting regimes: gender, care and migration

The very nature of state support for care and domestic work informs social practices. The raising demand for domestic (care) services in the European households since the 1990s has been related to the retrenchment of welfare states, the resulting shortages of public care services, ageing populations, increasing amount of dual earner families, the feminization of the labour force and the masculinization of women's employment patterns (Yeates 2005; Lutz 2007; Gavanas 2006; Daly and Lewis 2000; Kvist and Peterson 2010). The growing importance of paid domestic work can also be understood in the light of the increasing amount of female migrants from poorer countries, disposed to perform this work for low wages. A two-tier labour market has been established, one for EU citizens and one for nationals of third countries who provide cheap and flexible labour (Kofman 2001). Many migrant women perform domestic services in private households, caring for the elderly and children, cleaning, cooking and ironing. The emergence of the phenomenon of global care chains, with migrant women from the Third World performing care and domestic work in households in the First World definitively adds complexity to the problem of gender inequality. Additionally, as Fiona Williams argues (2001), the phenomenon of global care chains adds weight to the argument that care is a central analytical category in social policy.

The globalization of care and domestic work is an emerging issue in the literature on gender and welfare states. This phenomenon also points to the need to see gender and welfare state regimes as linked to migration regimes, associated with the norms and rules regulating citizenship and labour migration, and practices of exclusion and inclusion (Lister et. al. 2007; Williams 1995). Welfare policies as well as migration policies shape the migrant care workers' and domestic workers' positions, their opportunities and constraints (Williams and Gavanas 2008). Migration regimes are characterized by their immigration policies; they determine rules for non nationals' entrance in and exit out of the country, and whether they have access to settlement and naturalization. Migration regimes also determine employment and social, political and civil rights. Legislation on discrimination and strategies for cultural pluralism, integration and assimilation are also part of such policy regimes (Williams and Gavanas 2008: 16). Migration policy in the European Union has been dominated by the so-called needs of the labour market and gendered norms are deeply inscribed in the definition of needs. In order to enable nationals to reconcile work and family life, countries like Spain, Italy and Greece have had a policy of quotas for –most often female– domestic (care) workers. Other countries, like the Nordic states, have hardly admitted a need for migrant workers in their policies, yet this does not mean that migrant workers are absent but that they endure the difficult conditions of a life in a twilight zone (Lutz 2008: 6). Although it would have been an interesting contribution, this study does not include a specific analysis of migration policies but pays attention to debates surrounding domestic service and the construction of migrant women and domestic workers as subjects in the politics of care.

In sum, the insertion of migrant women into care and domestic work employment bridges the gap between the need for care and the lack of state-provided care services. This is why domestic service is an important issue for welfare state studies. Anneli Anttonen sustains that care provision in private households performed by migrant

women is an especially extended practice in the family care model of the Southern European states (2005: 19). In a similar vein, Rachel Salazar Parreñas (2005) highlights the differences across welfare regimes in terms of the relevance attributed to global care chains. While Spain has relatively low welfare provisions, Sweden promotes gender-neutral parental leaves and universal entitlements in the form of allowances, subsidies and direct care services. Patterns of welfare provision seem to influence migration patterns and the insertion of migrants into domestic service jobs. States with low welfare provision, that is, states that keep the care of the family a private responsibility, like Southern European countries, have greater presence of migrant domestic (care) workers. In contrast, countries like Sweden, where the benefit system abides by universalism and provides large-scale institutional support for care, are less likely to rely on migrant domestic workers (2005: 374-5). But paid domestic work in private households has become more and more common during the last decade also in Sweden, which has been interpreted as related to the context of the decline of the welfare state (ILO 2008; Williams and Gavanas 2008; Calleman 2007).

Although researchers refer to the relation between the lack of public care provision and the globalization of domestic care work, I argue that theories on global care chains often do not pay sufficient attention to the role of the state in articulating meanings and value of care and domestic work. It is important to analyze the ways welfare state policies shape the social organization of care, for instance, by constructing domestic workers as a viable solution to care problems such as the “reconciliation of work and family life”. My analysis highlights the ways in which the state articulates meanings of paid and unpaid domestic work and its links to gender inequality; thus, the analysis takes a “top-down” perspective while many studies of the globalization of care and domestic work use a “bottom-up” perspective. Analyses of the voices of domestic workers are indeed very important, but this analysis is delimited to a perspective that focuses on the role of the state.

3.5.2 Normative subjects and exclusion in public policies

The present analysis is inspired by post-structural feminist accounts of the state given that they emphasize the heterogeneous and differentiated nature of the state (Kantola 2006; Kantola and Dahl 2005). A weakness of comparative studies on gender and welfare states is that they often overlook differences within states. An approach that accepts the differentiated nature of the state is helpful since it recognizes diversity and contradictory effects. This perspective recognizes both differences within states (for example, differences across policy debates, differences across actors, and differentiated effects) and between states (Spain and Sweden). State intervention involves a variety of institutions, policies and processes which in turn have different effects, on women and men, and on different groups of women (and men). Subsequently, the differentiated state can have both empowering and disempowering effects on women. The state is conceived as a set of power relations and political processes in which gender inequality is both produced and contested. Within this framework, the focus falls upon the construction of gender inequality in specific state discourses rather than on general terms. The

importance of language and discourse in constituting social reality is underlined (Pringle and Watson 2004). Following from this, I analyze state discourses surrounding the politics of care in order to map the different ways of representing gender inequality as a policy problem. I also explore the ways in which gender (in)equality is linked to the welfare state. The meaning of the state being women-friendly varies in different contexts and I am interested in the *representations* of the welfare state as “women-friendly” (or not) and the ways in which the welfare state is legitimized -or de-legitimized.

As I have shown, gender and welfare state studies often overlook the implications of the developments in feminist theory. Taking this criticism of gender and welfare state research seriously means developing the concept of intersectionality as an analytical tool. In sum, the analysis of policies surrounding care and domestic work needs to take into account the implications of intersectionality for various reasons. Firstly, intersectionality has become central to any understanding of gender through the developments within feminist movement debates and within feminist theory. Secondly, feminist theory in general, and research on global care chains specially, reveals the need to problematize the stability of the category “women” in relation to care and domestic work given the interconnection of categories of gender, race/ethnicity, and class in the construction of meanings of care work in the global economy. Thirdly, critics have shown that gender and welfare state studies often put forward a view of a women-friendly welfare state, linked to the dual earner model which involves an exclusionary vision of gender equality defined as equality only for white, heterosexual, working mothers. I have argued that the criticism of exclusionary norms can be equally applied to the “women-unfriendly welfare state”, linked to the strong male breadwinner model, given the underlying norm of heterosexual, middle- or upper-class mothers. Following from this, I argue that it is useful to develop a feminist welfare state analysis that enables an examination of the underlying normative assumptions of dominant discourses on gender inequality.

The debates concerning intersectionality refer to the question of how to deal with multiple intersecting differences. Nancy Fraser points out that her visions of gender equality in post-industrial welfare states will not affect all women (or all men) in the same way. Therefore, she argues, it is necessary to ask which groups of women and men are privileged and which groups are disadvantaged (1997: 51). I find it particularly useful to incorporate Kimberly Crenshaw’s (1989, 1991) concept of political intersectionality which refers to how inequalities and their intersections are relevant at the level of political strategies. Crenshaw shows how both sex discrimination policies and race discrimination policies have tended to marginalize the experiences of black women privileging the experiences of white women and black men respectively. More specifically, Crenshaw argues that both feminist and anti-racist politics, paradoxically, have often helped to marginalize the issue of violence against black women (1991: 1245). When it comes to the gender equality policies that I study, it is therefore relevant to ask how and where gender equality policies marginalize “other” women. As Crenshaw contends, the failure of feminism to question race means that the political strategies will often replicate or reinforce the subordination of people of colour. This goes for categories of class and sexuality too. As Avtar Brah and Ann Phoenix argue (2004: 78), a key feature of feminist analyses of intersectionality is that they are concerned with displacing the normative subject of feminism. I draw upon Dorte Staunæs (2003) as she emphasizes that social categories should not be seen as counting only for the marginalized, the non-

privileged “Other”; they also count as conditions for the more privileged and powerful. The present analysis explores how certain categories of women and men set the norm in specific policies and discourses. Thus, the analysis pays attention to the ways in which politics of care privilege certain groups of women (and men) over others. This is done by means of an examination of normative assumptions and exclusionary visions articulated in policy discourses. An important aspect to study is the ways in which the discourses provide certain subject positions at a given time and in a given context (Dahl 2000: 72).

Central questions that are explored through an in-depth empirical analysis are: What are the normative assumptions that underpin the problem representations? How and when do policies privilege certain groups of women (and men) over others? The comparison aims to reveal how dominant gender discourses and their normative assumptions reinforce certain privileges at the expense of “other” women. When the issue of intersecting inequalities is taken into account, differentiated and contradictory effects of policies can be revealed.

3.6 Summary

This study is situated in, and aims to contribute to, the literature on gender and the welfare state. Certainly, feminist welfare state studies have contributed extensively to our understanding of gender, welfare states and social policies. Given the sexual division of labour whereby women, and not men, perform care and domestic work, feminist welfare state research has made care a central concern. Feminist research has showed how gender is inscribed in welfare state regimes and social policies, and how welfare states enhance gendered norms such as the “male breadwinner” and “female caretaker”. The attribution of responsibility of care is central to the analysis, highlighting the distribution between state responsibility and individual, private solutions located in the family or the market (formal and informal). Following from this, I study the problem of gender inequality in relation to the politics of care, which I define as the politics of constructing meanings of care. The empirical study sets out to explore how gender inequality is framed as a policy problem in European politics of care. The empirical analysis examines Spanish and Swedish policy debates on the “reconciliation of work and family life”, “dependent care” and “domestic service”. I see these policy debates as forming part of the (re)construction and legitimation of the welfare state, revealing the continuous negotiation of (welfare) state boundaries and its relation to gender (in)equality.

This chapter has critically assessed the normative assumptions of comparative feminist welfare studies. Feminist welfare state studies often, implicitly or explicitly, put forward a certain type of welfare state as normative and “women-friendly”. The models assumed to be more women-friendly are those models where the state extensively assumes responsibility for care provision, such as the “dual breadwinner model”, the “Nordic model of social care”, the “earner-carer model” and the “caring state”. As such, social policy has been conceived as the embodiment of the women-friendliness of welfare states. Women have often been represented as a homogenous category sharing the same interests in care-related policies. Following from this, feminist welfare state

research has represented women as being liberated by the state and through social policy in the same way.

The notion of the women-friendly welfare state can be challenged with respect to the question of intersectionality. Comparative gender and welfare state studies often overlook the implications of the developments in feminist theory. I draw upon critical studies that have argued that the normative idea of a women-friendly welfare state involves an exclusionary vision of gender equality defined as equality only for white, heterosexual, working mothers. I argue that this criticism of the discourse on the Nordic women-friendly welfare state can be applied to the discourse on the Southern European women-unfriendly welfare state as well, since public policies reinforcing a strong male breadwinner model have, for instance, encouraged mothering in the home and breadwinning for men for a privileged race/ethnicity or class, while refusing other groups such support. Gender inequality has referred to heterosexual, middle- and upper-class mothers. Taking the criticism of the normative foundations of gender and welfare state studies seriously, the present study adopts a feminist welfare state analysis that enables a critical assessment of underlying normative assumptions and exclusion of dominant discourses on gender inequality.

A weakness of comparative studies on gender and welfare states is that they often overgeneralize differences between states and overlook differences within states. This comparative approach is inspired by post-structural feminist accounts of the state which emphasize the heterogeneous and differentiated nature of the state, recognizing diversity and contradictory effects. The comparative approach involves two in-depth analyses of case studies and the analysis pays attention to both differences within states (differences across policy debates, differences across state actors, differentiated effects) and between states (Spain and Sweden). The focus falls upon the construction of gender inequality in specific state discourses. The state is defined as a set of power relations and political processes in which gender inequality is both produced and contested. State intervention involves a variety of institutions, policies and practices which in turn have different effects, on women and men, and on different groups of women (and men). Consequently, the state can have both empowering and disempowering effects.

My argument is that the welfare state cannot be seen as *a priori* “women-friendly” or “unfriendly”, but in-depth empirical studies can help us understand how specific public policies construct gender and gender (in)equality and assess the effects this may have on women. I am interested in the ways in which policy debates construct the welfare state as “women-friendly” (or not) and how they privilege certain groups of women and men while excluding or marginalizing others. Since a weakness of comparative studies on gender and welfare states is that they often assume a homogeneous category of women, I argue that it is useful to develop the concept of political intersectionality as an analytical tool within the frame of welfare state studies. This concept emphasizes that policies designed to create gender equality can marginalize “other” (black, lesbian, working-class) women by privileging the experiences of certain categories of women and men (white, heterosexual, middle-class). Importantly, social categories are not seen as counting only for the marginalized, non-privileged “other”; they also count as conditions for the privileged.

This idea can be exemplified by the norm of the dual earner model. Studies show a tendency of European welfare states to move towards the dual earner model according to

which both women and men are/should be waged workers. Importantly, the premise here is that women's labour market participation is the key to gender equality, in line with the strategy of inclusion, but the dual earner model does not necessarily go hand in hand with an earner-carer model in which also men are carers. As Drucilla Barker (2005) points out, while paid employment is crucially important for women, the convergence of feminist interests in women's employment with the interests of global capitalism needs to be scrutinized. Some women have always been "in" the (formal and informal) labour market, but this has not automatically meant emancipation for women workers. The linking of paid work with emancipation, autonomy, self-realization and choice can be argued to reflect the experience of relatively privileged women.

The last section of this chapter has dealt with current welfare state change. The study focuses on relatively recent debates surrounding care, between 1995 and 2010. Studies have shown how the European Union policies and national policies surrounding care have been framed within a discourse that emphasize employment, global competitiveness, and the problems of ageing populations and low birth rates. The restructuring of welfare state provision has enhanced cash payments and tax credits for care, moving away from public services, in case these existed. Policies in the European Union have tended to stress the importance of employment and women's labour market participation has been prioritized over care-related needs. Dominant policy discourses have elevated the "ethics of work", not the "ethics of care" (Williams 2010). The rising demand for domestic services in the European households since the 1990s has been related to the retrenchment of welfare states, the ageing populations and the increasing amount of dual earner families. The insertion of migrant women into care and domestic work employment bridges the gap between the need for care and the lack of state-provided care services, particularly in the family care model of the Southern European states. This is why domestic service is an important issue for welfare state studies. Whereas the issues of "reconciliation of work and family life" and "dependent care" have been framed as central to welfare state analysis, domestic service has often been ignored in welfare state studies that focus on women's unpaid care and domestic work for family members. As a contrast to the more traditional topics of welfare state studies, and inspired by the insights of global care chains research and post-colonial theory I analyze the issue of paid domestic (care) work.

Research on global care chains exposes women's different positions in relation to domestic work and contributes to the literature on gender and the welfare state by reinforcing the need to adopt an intersectional approach. The analysis of paid domestic work contributes to gender and welfare research by taking the view from the margins of the welfare state in a globalized world (Kvist and Peterson 2010). The insights of the studies on global care chains underline the need to see gender and welfare state regimes as related to policies and practices of inclusion and exclusion. However, I argue that studies on global care chains do not pay sufficient attention to the crucial role of the state in shaping practices of exclusion and inclusion. Therefore, I analyze the ways welfare state policies shape the social organization of care, for instance, by constructing domestic workers as a viable and legitimate solution to Spanish families' care problems as in the debate on the "reconciliation of work and family life". While "bottom-up" analyses of the voices of domestic workers are very important, my analysis is delimited to a "top-down" perspective that focuses on the state.

4 Framing gender inequality as a policy problem: methodology

This study explores the framing of gender inequality as a policy problem as articulated in Spanish and Swedish politics of care in the period between 1995 and 2010. In this chapter, the methodology involved in analyzing the framing of gender inequality as a policy problem will be presented as well as the comparative approach. The chapter is organized in the following way:

Firstly, the key assumptions of the methodological approach are delineated by means of a discussion of *policy problems* and *problem representations*. The social constructivist approach to policy analysis adopted here is largely inspired by feminist theorist and policy analyst Carol Bacchi's "What's the problem represented to be?-approach" (1999; 2009b) and it rests upon the presumption that there are no objective policy problems and that "truths" are constructed within discourse. Absences in the political agenda are significant for the analysis given that they say something about what is being excluded or marginalized. Within this vein, I analyze different representations of gender inequality on the agenda and pay attention to what goes unquestioned revealing the silences in terms of gender relations, class, sexuality, etc.

Secondly, I focus on *discourse*, *power* and *subject positions*. The approach defines policy as discourse, and discourses can be seen as systems of thoughts composed of ideas, beliefs and practices. The analysis is inspired by discourse-oriented analyses which bring to light the relationship between discourse, power and subjects. I argue that, depending on how policies define and construct gender and gender inequality in specific contexts, they can be seen as having both empowering and disempowering effects on women. The effects of discourse can be related to the ways in which subjects are constituted in discourse. Following from this, the analysis pays attention to the ways in which discourses privilege certain subject positions and marginalize others. The process of constructing policy problems is referred to as a framing process. I discuss the concept of "strategic framing", which emerges from the tradition of social movement theory, clarifying that this analysis focuses on underlying normative assumptions rather than seeing discourses as intentionally used by different actors for specific purposes.

Thirdly, I centre upon the analysis of *dominating gender discourses*. Discourses produce and sustain hegemonic power. Feminism has often challenged dominant masculine discourses creating spaces for marginal discourses and revealing the ways in which women are positioned as the "other" in dominant discourses which construct the male as the norm. However, feminism and feminist research also contribute to the creation of certain realities, while marginalizing others; feminism produces its own dominant discourses. Critics have shown that feminist comparative welfare state studies have generated a discourse on the women-friendly welfare state. This discourse is exclusionary defining the problem of gender inequality as a problem only for white, heterosexual, working mothers. In chapter 3 I have argued that also the idea of the women-unfriendly welfare state embodied in the strong male breadwinner model builds upon exclusionary norms. The problem of gender inequality is defined mainly as a problem for white, middle-class, heterosexual mothers. Given the exclusionary norms

found in comparative feminist welfare state research, I argue that it is useful to develop a feminist welfare state analysis that enables an examination of the underlying normative assumptions embedded in discourses on gender inequality. I here draw upon research that develop critical analyses towards gender (in)equality by questioning what is often taken for granted, such as economic growth, progress and modernity.

Fourthly, I explain how I analyze dominating gender discourses by means of a *textual analysis*, which draws upon the Critical Frame Analysis developed within the European research projects MAQEEQ and QUING. The starting point of this approach is that there are multiple ways of framing gender inequality as a policy problem and, thus, that there are multiple visions of gender equality embedded in problem representations. The textual analysis reveals competing ideas about what the problem is and what solutions are considered feasible. By both building upon the guide to textual analysis (*sensitizing questions*) developed within the research projects and redefining it, the textual analysis draws special attention to dimensions of diagnosis and prognosis, gender and intersectionality, location and voice. I will explain each of these dimensions of the textual analysis and how they relate to the theoretical debates developed in chapter 2 and 3. The aim of the analysis is not to reveal what “real” gender equality would be but to scrutinize the way in which gender (in)equality is produced and given meaning while other possible representations are obscured. The analysis of the individual textual analyses together identifies the dominant discourses surrounding gender inequality with attention to underlying normative assumptions and silences.

Lastly, the chapter discusses the methodology of *contrasting case studies*. The study compares the framing of gender inequality as a policy problem in Spanish and Swedish politics of care. Given the prevalence of quantitative and positivist comparative research, qualitative and discourse-oriented comparisons have been marginal, not least within comparative welfare state research. Feminist comparative research tends to focus on institutions and policies but not discourses. While comparative studies have been criticized for making comparisons when concepts have different meanings in different contexts, cross-country differences in meanings of gender inequality are here seen as an interesting point of departure. In this study the contrasting case studies serve to illuminate the problem of gender inequality in the context of changing European welfare states. The comparative approach is helpful in revealing both shared normative assumptions and context-related norms and silences. It serves to pinpoint both dominant discourses and what is not being problematized in each context. In this final part of the chapter I introduce the case studies and explain the selection of policy debates and the selection of policy texts based on the “issue history” (re)constructed for each debate.

4.1 Policy problems and representations

The approach to public policies that I adopt in this study makes critical reflection on the construction of policy problems central to the analysis. It is concerned with the social construction or representation of policy problems and the production of meaning. In *Women, Politics and Policy. The Construction of Policy Problems* (1999) Bacchi provides a helpful overview of how policy studies have analyzed policy problems,

shifting from an objectivist view of social problems towards a social constructionist perspective of problems. Drawing upon Bacchi's work I will here present some of the key differences between different types of policy analysis and introduce the analysis of problem representation.

Comprehensive rational approaches to policy have embraced a positivist epistemology, with the view that there is a real world which is accessible to objective description and analysis. The policy process is seen as clear-cut stages of agenda-setting, formulation, decision-making, implementation and evaluation. The assumption is that there are objective social problems which need addressing and policy makers will approach the problem rationally and come up with the best solution given cultural, political and economic constraints (Parsons 1995; Lombardo and Meier 2009). Policy is principally a process of problem-solving and, therefore, this perspective is not concerned with the nature of policy problems. Following from this, values stand outside of the policy-making process; democracy is seen as technocracy. The focus on technical expertise leads to the labelling of "technical rationalism", which emphasizes the need for expertise and not political participation (Bacchi 1999: 17-8).

Political rationalist approaches have more generally been described as pluralist. This approach rejects that idea that there are readily identified problems and the focus on finding technical solutions. There is an emphasis on shifting positions and perspectives, focusing on the political nature of the policy process, on party politics and bureaucratic politics in decision-making. Values are seen as part of the negotiation process. The pluralist approach argues that political participation is crucial; the openness of the process and the wide range of participants will result in good policy solutions. Political rationalists represented part of the political revolt in the US in the 1960s with black demands for civil rights, women's demands for equal rights, students' demands for participatory democracy, etc. Here, the nature of the problem is in question. Within this vein, Martin Rein and Donald Schön (1977) criticize the image of the policy process as beginning with a shared articulation of the most problematic situation. They see the policy process as being essentially about problem-settling, paying attention also to "non-problems". David Dery (1984) uses the term problem definition and argues that the very notion of problem definition suggests a constructivist rather than an objectivist view. Problems do not exist out there; they are not objective entities in their own right, but rather the product of imposing certain frames of reference on reality. Each solution or policy proposal seems to have a different problem in mind. By examining the solution we can uncover the presumed problem and indeed the problem representation. According to Dery, problem definition is a task of analysts, but the analyst is recommended to define the problem in order to make it possible to find solutions. Charles Lindblom (1980) puts forward a similar view: policy problems are opportunities for action. Hence, a problem should be defined in a way that makes it possible to take action and to improve the situation. Problems must be defined so as to guide further policies and if there is no solution, there is no problem. Political rationalists adopt an optimistic view of democracy and the role of the analyst (Bacchi 1999: 17-31). They appeal to empirical tests which indicate certain positivism in spite of the insistence upon a social constructivist perspective, and so problems still remain "out there". The assessment of public policies must aim to determine the right or good decision. Analysts are provided with a

framework of ideals which are considered to be uncontroversial like, for instance, economic progress (ibid. 32-5).

While policy analysis has focused on policy problems and policy solutions, sociological perspectives have focused on the *construction of social problems*. Sociological theory of social problems has shifted from emphasizing social problems as social pathology and the idea that social organization is good and disruption bad, to a conflict approach where different groups are recognized as having different needs. Labelling theory is a variant of social constructivism which analyzes the process of labelling some groups or individuals as, for instance, “deviant”. In this approach the problem is not out there to be identified, but constructed in its nature. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman’s work *The social construction of reality* (1967) has been seen as the starting point of social constructivism with an emphasis on the meanings individuals assign to reality rather than upon an objective reality standing outside individual interpretation. Furthermore, Malcom Spector and John Kitsuse (1977) have brought social constructivism to social problems theory. Social problems should not be seen as objective conditions to be studied and corrected but as interpretative processes that constitute what comes to be seen as oppressive, intolerable or unjust, like crime, poverty or homelessness (Bacchi 1999: 50-7).

Drawing upon the sociology of social problems Bacchi emphasizes the constructedness of social problems. Nevertheless, she emphasizes the construction of *policy problems*, distancing herself from the dominant sociological approaches¹⁵. In line with the work of Carol Bacchi, the analysis that I develop here focuses on *problem representations*. The use of the concept representation does not mean that I assume that there is a reality that stands “outside” of representation. Discourses provide frameworks through which we understand reality and there is no reality outside of interpretation: “Representations do not imitate reality but are practices through which things take on meaning and value” (Shapiro 1988, in Bacchi 1999: 37). The focus on problem representation questions the adequacy of defining problems in terms of their possibility of intervention. It is important to draw attention to what is left out when problems are defined in a way that refuses to examine “irresolvable” issues. Scholars have argued that a better problem definition will lead to better solutions¹⁶. But as Bacchi argues, it is not possible to separate the solution from the problem representation. Following from this, the task of the analyst is not to identify how the problem can be defined in a better way but to scrutinize the normative assumptions about the nature of the problem and its solutions. Every solution or policy proposal has a particular representation of what the problem is. The analysis emphasizes the unpacking of the implications of representing a problem in a certain way. This approach to policy analysis draws attention not only to the representation of those issues that enter the agenda, but also to what does not get

¹⁵ Bacchi emphasizes that the sociology of social problems has insufficiently explored how the language of social problems involves a norm of responding to “disturbing conditions”. Furthermore, she argues that a limitation of the social problems theory is that the analysis only focuses on what has been claimed. A distance is established between the researcher and the object of study, focusing on the claim-makers. Looking just at the articulated claims is not enough since we also need to pay attention to excluding practices and processes.

¹⁶ Following Bacchi’s argument, the term problem definition enhances the view that this is a separate part of the policy process.

problematized. Questions of who has a legitimate voice and who is excluded are significant in order to understand the problem representations (Bacchi 1999: 36, 60).

Within this vein, the study I develop here explores different representations of gender inequality on the agenda and pays attention to what goes unquestioned. The analysis looks at the representations of policy problems on the political agenda, but the purpose is also to ask what does not get problematized and to draw attention to the silences in the agenda, silences related to power relations, gender relations, class, sexuality, etc. In the sections below I will situate the study of the representation of policy problems within the framework of discourse-oriented analysis, discuss the conceptualization of power and highlight the construction of subject positions within discourse.

4.2 Discourse, power and subject positions

The analytical approach that I adopt takes a social constructivist perspective on policy problems as the point of departure. The analysis is inspired by discourse-oriented analytical approaches which share a critical perspective on established knowledge with a focus on language and the processes by which meanings and categories are constituted in a specific time and historical context. The way we talk about the world does not neutrally reflect the world, our identities or social relations, but is an active part of creating and changing it. The analysis of problem representations defines *policy* as *discourse*. Drawing upon Michel Foucault's work, discourses can be defined as "systems of thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of action, beliefs and practices that systematically construct the subjects and the worlds of which they speak" (Lessa 2006: 285). Thus, discourses systematically form the objects and subjects of which they speak (Foucault 1972: 49). Discourses do not identify objects, they constitute them and in the practice of doing so conceal their own invention. As Stephen Ball (1990) contends, discourses are about what can be said, and thought, but also who can speak, when, where and with what authority. In so doing, discourses play an important role in delimiting policy and constructing the alternatives considered feasible. At the same time, discourses are not absolute, they are multiple and contradictory. Words and concepts shift in meaning and their effects vary as they are deployed within different discourses. Values are a key ingredient in discourse¹⁷, organized to assign meaning and to designate roles (Bacchi 1999: 49). Religious doctrines, political institutions and cultural myths are all part of shaping discourses. We can, for instance, talk about the importance of a discourse on rights in countries that have bill of rights, or the importance of a liberal discourse in countries which constitutionally privilege the protection of liberty. In the following sections I will discuss the concept of discourse and its relation to power and subject

¹⁷ According to Marx Ferey and Merrill, frames do not ground thinking on what is normatively good or bad, nor do they imply goals and objectives. Frames merely provide a certain cognitive focus and, thus, put certain elements or ideas "in the picture" or not (2000: 456). I think the definition of frames they provide is a rather limited analytical tool, given that they do not take into account normative claims. My analysis sees normative claims as a central element of framing policy problems.

positions. These ideas can be understood in the context of the “linguistic turn” of social sciences.

4.2.1 The “linguistic turn”

In the 1970s the social sciences underwent a “*linguistic turn*”, recognizing the significance of studying “discourse”. A wide field of discourse analytical approaches has subsequently emerged, in which we find a range of different approaches with different theoretical backgrounds: discursive psychology, critical linguistics, Foucauldian research, de-constructivist analysis, qualitative content analysis, frame analysis, etc. (Kantola 2006: 23). The concept of discourse plays a significant role in contemporary social science and there has been an increasing interest in discourse analysis in many different academic disciplines: political science, gender studies, post-colonial studies, sociology, history and International Relations given the discontent with mainstream positivist approaches (Howarth 2000:1). Applied to the field of policy analysis, an interest in discourse becomes an interest in the ways in which objects and subjects are constituted in language of public policies (Bacchi 1999: 39-41).

As Joan Scott (1988) contends, *language* refers to a meaning-constituting system, any system –verbal or other– through which meaning is constituted and cultural practices organized and by which people represent and understand the world. The analysis of language is a starting point for understanding how social relations are conceived, how institutions are organized, how relations of production are experienced, and how collective identity is established. Scott argues that: “Without attention to language and the processes by which meanings and categories are constituted, one only imposes oversimplified models of the world, models that perpetuate conventional understandings rather than open up new interpretive possibilities” (Scott, 1988: 35). Without a focus on language, historicised concepts are otherwise treated as natural (like the binary man/woman) or absolute (like equality/ justice). Words and texts do not have fixed or intrinsic meanings and there is no self-evident relationship between them and ideas or things. From this point of view, there is no intrinsic correspondence between language and the world. Although scholars propose different approaches to discourse analysis¹⁸, all start

¹⁸ For overviews of differences between discourse-analytical approaches see, for instance, Winther Jørgensen and Phillips 1999, and Torfing 2005. Different approaches to discourse analysis provide different answers to the question: do discourses constitute the social world entirely or do other aspects also constitute it. I will not engage in this debate, but as illustrating examples we can mention *critical discourse analysis*, elaborated by Norman Fairclough among others, which emphasizes that discourses produce the social world, but discourses are only one among several aspects of social practices; discourses stand in a dialectic relation to other non-discursive social practices. Discourses shape social structures and processes but they also reflect them. Others define discourse as encompassing all social phenomena. *Discourse theory* developed by the post-structuralist theorists Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe defines discourse as historically variable conditions of possibility of what we say, think, imagine and do. Laclau and Mouffe discard the distinction between the discursive and the non-discursive arguing that seemingly non-discursive phenomena like technology, institutions and economy are ultimately constructed in and through discursive systems. Following from this, there is no ontological difference between the linguistic and behavioural aspects of social practice. Both the social and the physical world exist but are always mediated by discourses.

from the broadly accepted recognition that language, the medium of interaction, creation and dissemination of discourses is deeply implicated in the creation of regimes of truth. Thus, they set out to explore the ways in which realities, through discourses, are constructed, made factual and justified, bringing about effects (Lessa 2006: 285-6).

In this study I focus on how problems are thought about, or “*problematizations*” (Foucault 1997). This is done by means of studying discourses. As systems of thought, discourse has a wider meaning than language, but language is the crucial means to study discourse. Discourse analysis claims that our access to reality goes through language; through language we create representations of reality that are never merely reflections of an already existing reality but part of creating it. This does not mean that reality does not exist. Rather, the physical world exists but it only gets meaning through discourse. The meanings of objects depend on the orders of discourse that constitute their identity and significance. This is illustrated by Jakob Torfing by referring to the meaning of a particular piece of land. The land can be constructed as a “habitat for an endangered species by a group of biologists, a recreational facility by the urban population, fertile farm land by the local farmers, or a business opportunity by urban developers” (Torfing 2005: 18).

This problem-driven approach seeks to “identify specific empirical, analytical, or societal puzzles” (Torfing 2005: 22). Definitively, discourse-analytical approaches have no intention of building a general theory of, for instance, welfare state reform. They do not seek causal explanations of social phenomena, nor do they attempt to establish empirical generalizations or test universal hypothesis. In contrast, the aim is to understand and explain social phenomena through contextualized studies of the historical conditions in which discourses emerge and take effect. The focus lies on both change and continuity, seeking to untangle the interplay between “path-dependency” and “path-shaping” (ibid. 20). The study of the representation of policy problems coincides with the above ideas emphasizing the importance of language, discourse and problematization in policy analysis. Next, I turn to the connection between discourse, power and knowledge.

4.2.2 Power and knowledge

Discourse analysis is based on a critical perspective on established knowledge. Our knowledge and views of the world are not reflections of a reality out there but rather a product of our own ways of categorizing the world. The production of knowledge is bound up with historically specific regimes of power. Thus, discourse and power are inherently intertwined (Foucault 1980: 187). Furthermore, our knowledge of the world is always contingent on a cultural and historical context, which means that our knowledge and identities change over time and could always be different. Thus, discourse analysis emphasizes the historically and culturally specific (Ferey et. al 2002). This view is *anti-essentialist* given that the social world is discursively constructed, which implies that it has no “essence” or authentic characteristics. This means rejecting the idea that there is an underlying essence or pre-existing reality of discourse (Howarth 2000: 49, 83). It is not possible to reach the truth since we can never speak from a position located outside of the discourses. There is no way out of representations. Following from this, discourse

analysis does not seek to uncover the true underlying meaning of texts and actions deliberately concealed in ideological practices. The “hermeneutics of suspicion” found in Marx, Freud and Nietzsche seeks to uncover the deep truth in practices. By contrast, from a discourse-oriented perspective, it is not possible to reach the truth and, therefore, it is better to ask how truths are constructed discursively (Winther Jørgensen and Phillips 1999: 20). Discourses overlap, influence each other and compete with one another and appeal to one another’s truths in order to attain authority and legitimization (Scott 1988: 35).

Foucault’s (1980) theories on power, resistance and subjectivity have been particularly important¹⁹. His theories articulate a productive notion of power that is not antithetical to subjectivity and resistance. Where there is power there is resistance, and both domination and empowerment are central elements of any exercise of power. Power and discourse are closely interlocked since the elaboration of meaning involves the exercise of power (Torfing 2005: 7). Foucault’s notion of power rejects the classical notion of sovereign power understood as dominance and oppression. Power is not something some agents use over passive subjects, but something that is dispersed in different social practices. Hence, power constitutes discourses, knowledge, bodies, subjects and subjectivities. It is not possessed but exercised, and operates as both enabling and constraining by structuring the possibilities of choices, decisions and practices. Power is both something that created our social world and something that restricts the possible perceptions of the world in certain ways excluding others. It can be seen as political acts of inclusion and exclusion that shape social meanings and identities. The construction of discourse involves the exercise of power given that their constitution involves the exclusion of certain possibilities and the structuring of relations between different actors (Winther Jørgensen and Phillips 1999: 20).

Discourses are contingent and historical constructions, which are always vulnerable to those political forces excluded in their production (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000: 4). This makes possible a certain freedom of subjects to both maintain systems of domination and to propose counter-strategies of resistance. Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or opposed to it. Conversely, discourse analysis must take into account the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy (Howarth 2000: 78, 81; Ferree 2009: 99). The analysis that I develop here emphasizes the ways in which discourses provide certain privileged subject positions while marginalizing other. In the next section I will pay specific attention to the relation between discourses and subject positions.

4.2.3 Subject positions

As historically specific systems of meaning, discourses form subjects. Subjects can be defined as ways of speaking within a particular discourse (Howarth 2000: 9, 80).

¹⁹ For feminist critiques of Foucault’s work see, for example, Ramazanoglu (1993), Diamond and Quinby (1988), Fraser (1989), Kantola (2006).

Foucault's understanding of the subject differs from the prevailing Western assumptions of the subject as an autonomous and sovereign unit (Winther Jørgensen and Phillips 1999: 21-2). Subjects do not autonomously produce discourses; rather, subjects are the function and effect of discourse (Howarth 2000: 63). Discourses provide *subject positions* with which people can identify (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000: 3). Thus, attention is drawn to the way in which discourses constitute subjects looking at, for instance, the effects of naming subjects the "battered wife", "criminals" or "insane". An important aspect of the analysis is the ways in which the discourses provide certain subject positions at a given time and in a given context; what subject positions are deemed as relevant? (Dahl 2000: 72). As for the present analysis it becomes relevant to ask from what positions subjects can speak, as mothers, daughters, workers, immigrants, housewives, caregivers, etc.

The discursive construction of groups is based on the (explicit or implicit) exclusion of *the other*. The "other" is a category that makes up the contrast by which identification is created. At the same time, differences are ignored *within* the groups and, thereby, alternative possibilities for creating groups are also ignored. Groups are not given but constituted when they are expressed, when someone speaks of or for the group. Mapping the "other", always created implicitly or explicitly at the same time as "we", can give us a clue about what the discourse is excluding and what social consequences this may have (Winther Jørgensen and Phillips 1999: 52-4). From this perspective, gender equality issues are not only about justice or fairness, they are also about the kind of subjects that policies and practices encourage and legitimize (Magnusson, Rönblom and Silius 2008: 8).

Our own research necessarily constitutes discursive constructions that give one view of the world among other possible ones. This idea stands in contrast to the positivist research where knowledge is seen as a passive reflection of an objective reality. The point of departure is that we can never reach the reality outside of the discourses so the discourses themselves are the object of research. Since we are part of the culture we study, we often share certain truths, or taken-for-granted categories, with the material that we study. The strategy is to, as far as possible, make the familiar strange, to question what goes without saying (Winther Jørgensen and Phillips 1999: 28). Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1991) contends that Western feminist researchers need to examine their own positions within global economic and political hierarchies, arguing that while feminist scholars have criticized the idea of objectivity and universalism in male-dominated science, feminist research has also been involved in hegemonic representation and marginalization, constructing poor women of colour as passive and victimized "Other". We need to recognize that knowledge is always situated (Haraway 1988). This perspective suggests a critical scrutinizing of our own categories, asking, for instance, when and how feminist research produces visions of gender equality without questioning the inequalities related to class, race/ethnicity and sexuality.

I write this thesis in English being situated in the context of Spanish academia and there are linguistic differences between English and Spanish academic writing that need to be discussed here. While in English it is a widespread practice to speak in first person, using "I", it is more common in the Spanish language to use "we" or passive "neutral" forms of writing. Given that I write this thesis in English I adhere to the English tradition, thus using the form "I". Importantly, from a feminist perspective it is also essential to

recognize the situatedness of knowledge and, thus, it is necessary to recognize my voice in this work. As a researcher I do not stand outside of representations and, hence, I do not presume to take an objective position, telling the “truth” about what gender (in)equality really is (Rönnblom 2005: 238). The analysis that I develop here studies gender equality policies, not in order to evaluate objectively their impact or success, but to critically scrutinize them and for this I draw upon political intersectionality as an analytical tool emphasizing normative assumptions and silences. I will explain this more in depth in the sections related to the textual analysis.

Discourses have *social and material consequences*²⁰. Critical analysis can involve exposing the consequences of framing a problem in one way or another (Bacchi 1999; Magnusson, Rönnblom and Silius 2008). There is a link between knowledge and action given that different understandings of the world lead to different social actions, actions that are seen as natural or thinkable (Winther Jørgensen and Phillips, 1999: 12-5). The effects of discourses can be related to the division between the public and private; the effects of constructing a certain issue as a private problem or a public concern. Narratives on the private are used to legitimate the lack of state intervention, while narratives on the public justify state intervention. The way in which public policies declare some areas out of bounds of justifiable intervention mystifies the ways in which the state constitutes relations with these areas (Bacchi 1999: 134). The effects of discourses can be related to the ways in which subjects are constituted in discourse. This implies an interest in the way in which groups are assigned positions and value within discourses by being labelled, for instance, as “needy” (Fraser 1989). Subject positions can involve potential empowering and/or disempowering effects. For instance, the discourse on the needy gives power to those designing the policy but can operate as disempowering for those defined as “suplicants” or subordinate.

4.2.4 Framing processes: strategic framing or normative assumptions?

The concept of *framing* is used in the analysis to refer to the process of articulating meanings. The politics of framing can be defined as the process of constructing meaning and, thereby, also constituting reality. The analysis builds upon Critical Frame Analysis developed within the research projects MAGEEQ and QUING (Verloo 2007) which I will explain further on in the explanation of the textual analysis.

Frame analysis has been conceptualized as a type of discourse analysis. However, its roots can be found in social and cognitive psychology, rather than in the post-structuralist philosophy and linguistic approaches which inspire this work. Frame

²⁰ Critics have seen a problem in the alleged idealism and textualism of discourse analysis, which reduce social systems to ideas and language, neglecting material conditions and institutions. In empiricist, realist and Marxist conceptions, the objective world determines the truthfulness of discourses (Howarth 2000: 7). Discourse analysis is criticized for being a relativist approach that cannot sort out what is true; each result is just one story of reality among others. Researchers are incapable of making objective value judgements about the objects of their study. It has been seen as useless politically since it cannot say what is good or bad. Nevertheless, it is not necessary to subscribe to the scepticism towards constructivism if one emphasizes the implications and effects of particular representations (Bacchi 1999: 55).

analysis has largely been developed within studies of social movements focusing on the potentials for mobilization (Snow and Benford 2000, 1988; Tarrow 1998; McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996). The focus falls upon the ways in which social and political actors make sense of reality and shape reality. Many different terms have been deployed within this approach to describe the interpretation and construction of reality: frame, schema, script, scenario and package are some of them (Triandafyllidou and Fotiou 1998). The work of sociologist Erving Goffman (1974) emphasizes how frames sort out and organize the complex stimuli of everyday life. Goffman defines frames as interpretations that enable individuals to locate, perceive, identify and label occurrences within their life space and the world at large (Goffman 1974, in Snow and Benford 2000: 614). Research building upon Goffman's work has focused on how speech occurs, how cultural knowledge is used and on the interplay of intentions and constraints. Within the cognitive psychology tradition frames have been conceived as flexible and emergent mental constructs or structures. This perspective has been widely adopted within social movement theory conceiving frames as shared by enough individuals to channel individual behaviour into patterned social ones. Framing processes here refer to the emergent, contested and socially constructed character of cognitive frames as they are constructed in interaction (Oliver and Johnston 2000: 5). Other scholars have emphasized frames more as symbolic constructs. William A. Gamson defines frames as underlying structures or organizing principles that hold together and give coherence to a diverse array of symbols and idea elements (Gamson and Lasch 1983, in Creed et. al. 2002). In a similar vein, Anna Triandafyllidou and Anastasios Fotiou define frames as symbolic-interpretative constructs. They argue that frame analysis is concerned with the (re)construction and negotiation of reality by social/political actors through the use of symbolic tools (Triandafyllidou and Fotiou 1998: 1-2).

Frame analysis has also been applied to analyzing policies and policy-making. Policy frame analysis starts from the assumption that there are multiple interpretations in policy-making and the task is to map the different representations that the involved actors offer of policy problems and solutions (Verloo and Lombardo 2007). The aim is to identify dominant and contesting representations, and the contradictions within them, in the discourses of the actors involved in the construction of policy problems (Snow and Benford 2000, 1988; Rein and Schön 1993). Martin Rein and Donald Schön (1993) argue that policy frames are revealed through the stories that participants are disposed to tell about policy situations. These problem-setting stories link causal accounts of policy problems to particular proposals for action and facilitate the normative leap from the diagnosis of the problem to how things should be²¹. The process of framing socially constructs the situation, defining what is seen as problematic and suggesting appropriate courses of action. *Naming* has been referred to as part of framing processes. The assumption is that it matters what we label things and what cultural assumptions underlie such naming (Creed et al. 2002). When a policy terrain has been named, the name

²¹ Snow and Benford identify three core tasks of framing which they refer to as *diagnostic*, *prognostic* and *motivational* framing work (1988: 199). The diagnostic framing involves defining some aspects of social life as problematic and in need of change and the attribution of blame, responsibility and causality. The prognostic framing involves a proposed solution to the diagnosed problem that specifies what needs to be done. This entails an identification of strategies, tactics and targets. The motivation framing implies a call for action, a rationale and legitimation for action. This dimension has also been referred to as the "agency" component of framing (Snow and Benford 2000: 617).

appears as “natural”. The naming of a problem implies attention to certain elements and neglecting others as it organizes various aspects of an issue into a composite whole (Rein and Schön 1993: 153).

Strategic framing is a central idea within frame analysis²². Through strategic framing social movement actors shape their arguments to win support, sometimes positioning themselves in accordance with dominant cultural values in order to mobilize support (Oliver and Johnston 2000; McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996). Framing is then seen as contentious process where actors continuously create frames that reinforce or challenge the existing ones. Snow and Benford (1988: 198) argue that collective action frames simplify and condense aspects of the “world out there” in ways that are intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to acquire bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists. They argue that framing is essentially a strategic process, it is deliberative, utilitarian and goal-oriented: “frames are developed and deployed to achieve a specific purpose” (Snow and Benford 2000: 624). In a similar vein, Rein and Schön contend that the interpretation of particular policy issues in terms of various frames is undertaken by individuals, groups or organizations, who act as sponsors of specific frames (Rein and Schön 1993: 158). As such, the analysis assumes that framing is *intentional*; actors can deliberately choose between different frames in order to achieve their goals, mobilize support and to demobilize antagonists.

In this study I use the concept of discourse to refer to systems of thoughts and the concept of framing to denote the process of constructing policy problems. Given the social constructivist standpoint of the analytical framework adopted here, I am critical towards any positivist accounts of framing. David Snow and Robert Benford argue that “empirical credibility” affects the influence of frames; they ask if the claims can be empirically verified (Snow and Benford 2000: 619-20). In such an account frames are assessed according to their “correct” or “true” description of reality. Framing is a way of processing a complex reality, but it is assumed that there is a reality that to some extent stands “outside” of interpretation. The analysis that I develop here builds upon a theoretical and philosophical framework that rejects notions such as the rational actor, objective reality and objective science (Torfing 2005: 24). The idea of strategic framing assumes conscious means deployed by actors to further their own interests. But when frames become instrumental devices that can foster common perceptions and understandings for specific purposes, then the aim becomes to measure how effective they are in bringing about certain ends (Howarth 2000:3). When the focus falls upon systems of thought that delimit what can be said meaningfully, the idea of strategic framing is displaced (Wæver 2005:36).

Bacchi’s work (2009) is helpful as it attempts to tease out the concepts asking whether subjects are free to pick up and use discourses or if we are all “in discourse”²³.

²² In a similar vein, *discourse psychology* puts individuals’ active use of language in focus, examining how people strategically use discourses to enhance themselves or the world in certain favourable ways (Winther Jørgensen and Phillips 1999: 13-14).

²³ Bacchi (2005) relates these questions to two distinct discourse analytical traditions: discourse analysis and analysis of discourses. Discourse analysis, related to discourse psychology, focuses on patterns of speech and on how individual subjects negotiate their way through all-encompassing but conflicting discursive structures and meanings. The analysis of discourses aims to identify institutionally supported and culturally influenced interpretative and conceptual schemas that produce particular understandings of issues. The analysis of hegemonic discourses problematizes the underlying normative assumptions and

To what extent are subjects discourse users or, rather, constituted in discourse? She insists that framing presupposes a certain degree of intentionality. But she also asks: to what extent are concepts empty signifiers that can just be filled with new meanings by strategic actors? The relatively open meaning of concepts and categories means that there is a possibility to deploy them deliberately, there is space for agency. At the same time, historical and cultural investments in specific meanings create limitations with respect to the range of possibilities in filling categories with meaning. Concepts and categories operate as political signifiers and have already acquired meaning and, hence, they are not completely open to be filled with new meaning. Foucault's work draws attention to the constitutive power of discourse, aligned with the position that we are all "in discourse", in contrast to the view that subjects are "discourse users". Thought is not autonomously produced by individual subjects as conceptualized in Western philosophy and, consequently, we do not speak discourse –the discourse speaks us (Ball 1990, in Bacchi 2005: 200). Within this vein, the emphasis lies on the limits of what can be said meaningfully and not on exploring the intentions of speaking subjects. The perception that constructs are mental, "in people's heads", can be associated with the Western notion of autonomous individuals who shape their own reality²⁴. This view does not sufficiently recognize the constraints upon the shaping process. Subjects can never be located outside of history, outside of discourse. In sum, the concern here is not so much about where discourses come from but what effects of power and knowledge they ensure (Kantola 2006: 25).

The standpoint is that there is no reality "outside" of our interpretations; reality is only available to us through language and our own categories. Yet, discourses are not fixed systems of meanings and there is always space for agency, for actors to shape discourse (Verloo and Lombardo 2007: 40). In contrast to the methodology that I develop here, Critical Frame Analysis involves both the analysis of strategic framing and the analysis of underlying normative assumptions (Lombardo, Meier and Verloo 2009). I acknowledge that the notion of strategic framing can be useful precisely to emphasize agency. Indeed, actors actively (re)produce dominant discourses as well as challenge them. However, this is beyond the scope of this study which analyzes state discourses as articulated in acts, government bills, parliamentary bills, policy plans and parliamentary debates. Within this vein, the analysis that I adopt highlights the construction of policy problems, the underlying logic of discourses, the formation of normative subjects within discourse, and the political effects of such constructions. By analyzing underlying normative assumptions of problem representations, we can get an idea of what dominant discourses are at work, how they inform the framing of a specific policy problem and what they exclude. Ideally this can contribute to public debate raising new and normative questions (Dahl 2000: 330). For instance, as Bacchi argues (2009a), the framing of prostitution as "sex work" can be seen as located in a discourse associated with the "value of paid work" in Western industrialized countries. Hence, it can be useful to

premises of policies. A problem with this perspective, Bacchi argues, has been the tendency to use discourses as "ways of arguing" about an issue, presupposing that we can choose between different discourses. This means losing the sense of how hegemonic discourses constrain meaning and it makes it difficult for feminists to reflect upon the implications of being located within discourse.

²⁴ As Jakob Torfing (2005) argues, if we seek to explore the thoughts or hidden motives of actors we are not working within a language-centred discourse analysis but within psychological or cognitive approaches.

reflect upon the ways in which discourses delimit and constrain the framing of a specific policy problem on the agenda.

4.3 Analyzing dominant gender discourses

Gender discourses include debates surrounding equality and power, rights and privileges, sameness and difference (Marx Ferree and Merrill 2000: 455). Discourses produce and sustain hegemonic power and, therefore, the task of feminism can be to challenge dominant masculine discourses and create spaces for marginal and unrecognized discourses (Diamond and Quinby 1988). Within this framework it is important to identify the ways in which women are positioned as “other” in dominant discourses constructing the male as the norm. But feminist researchers also contribute to the creation of certain realities, theorists are also part of constructing understandings of reality and, hence, in shaping reality. In spite of remaining marginal in mainstream scientific discourses, feminism produces its own dominant discourses (Kantola 2006: 27; Lombardo, Meier and Verloo 2009: 9-10).

This is illustrated by the discourse on the women-friendly welfare state, which I scrutinize in chapter 3. The welfare state models assumed to be more women-friendly are those models where the state widely assumes responsibility for care provision, associated with models such as the “dual breadwinner model”, the “Nordic model of social care” and the “caring state”. There has been a tendency to represent women as a homogenous group with equal and shared interests when it comes to welfare state policies and care provision. Following from this, this research has tended to claim that all women are liberated or restrained through the state and social policies in the same way. Women’s labour market participation often emerges as the key to gender equality. Critics have underlined that the discourse on a women-friendly welfare state involves an exclusionary vision of gender equality defining the problem of gender inequality as a problem only for white, heterosexual, working mothers. I argue that also the strong male breadwinner model which transmits an idea of women-unfriendly welfare states builds upon exclusionary norms, considering the problem of gender inequality to be mainly a problem of white, middle-class, heterosexual mothers. Working-class women, who have always participated in formal or informal labour markets, have been marginalized in this model.

Given the exclusionary norms embedded in gender and welfare state research, I have argued that it is crucial to develop a feminist welfare state analysis that enables an examination of the underlying normative assumptions underpinning gender equality policies. This analysis of normative assumptions surrounding gender and the welfare state has found inspiration in Nancy Fraser’s approach of *politics of need interpretation* (1989). Fraser focuses on the ways in which social policy issues have been framed in order to understand the ideological dimensions of welfare states. By politics of need interpretation she refers to the tacit norms and implicit assumptions that are constitutive of social policy. She sustains that only in terms of a discourse oriented to the politics of need interpretation can feminists meaningfully intervene in the welfare debates over social spending or restructuring of the welfare state. Thereby Fraser argues in favour of a shift in the focus of analysis from needs to discourses about needs, from the distribution

of need satisfaction to the politics of need interpretation (1989: 162). The discursive or ideological dimension of welfare analysis does not mean anything different from welfare practices, but attention to the tacit norms and implicit assumptions that are constitutive of such practices. This requires a meaning-oriented inquiry that considers welfare programs as institutionalized patterns of interpretation. Such an inquiry aims to make explicit the constructed meanings within social policy programs; meanings that otherwise tend to simply go without saying. The reason why needs and interests are not always recognized as interpretations is the depth at which gendered meanings and norms are embedded in our general culture (1989: 154). The politics of need interpretation expose the processes by which welfare programs and practices construct women and women's needs according to certain contestable interpretations. The analysis that I develop here does not specifically use the concept of *needs* but focuses on the construction of *problems*. It aims to examine discourses on gender equality and the welfare state in order to reveal the underlying normative assumptions of specific problem representations and to discern what they leave out.

To highlight the importance of grasping underlying norms and their effects in relation to gender (in)equality I draw upon different illustrating examples from Sweden and Spain. Malin Rönnblom's (2009) analysis of gender equality policies in regional politics in Sweden shows how *economic growth* has been an unquestioned norm. Economic growth entails a narrative of progress and modernism and it is essential to understand the ways in which the dominant discourse on growth influences the notion of gender equality.

Ann Towns (2002) reveals the normative assumption of gender equality as a Swedish national trait. She shows that gender equality discourses have produced a unifying identity in Sweden, linking gender equality to the notions of *Swedishness*, while at the same time creating divisions within the state. Sweden has come to understand itself as a champion of gender equality internationally, representing itself as a model, having progressed the most in empowering women, while characterizing immigrants as the gender-unequal "other". Thus, the gender equality discourse, concerned with inequality between women and men, has become involved in the construction of a new inequality, the categorization of the population into "Swedes" and "immigrants".

Robina Mohammad's (2005) accounts of Spanish state feminism show how the dominant discourse of gender equality has been associated with a *modernity project* which privileges certain categories of women. The discourse has privileged inequalities produced by gender and the man/women binary, and the home has been conceived as oppressive while the public sphere and paid work have been viewed as the key to emancipation. Thus, the strategy of inclusion has been dominant and this conceptualization of gender equality serves to valorize some women while marginalizing others. Modern, middle-class women have been seen as the key to national progress as opposed to "traditional" women. Mohammad argues that a discourse that almost exclusively addresses women's inequality by focusing on their exclusion from the formal labour market ignores women's engagement in paid informal work and the precariousness of the capitalist labour market.

Without a doubt, gender equality is not something that just "is" in some unproblematic way, but something that may be understood and packaged in several different ways – ways that have several different consequences (Magnusson, Rönnblom

and Silius 2008: 7). Therefore, it is imperative to study the way gender (in)equality is produced and given certain meanings while others are obscured. Such an analysis avoids all presumption of claiming to know what “real” gender equality is or would be, and so the task is to explore the different representations of gender (in)equality that are produced and reflect upon its political consequences (ibid. 8). The identification of normative assumptions can reveal dominant discourses as well as exclusionary processes; what is not problematized? It raises questions about the ways in which women are positioned as the “other” in relation to the male norm, what discourses of gender equality are dominant, who is considered a legitimate subject and what groups or issues are excluded or marginalized. Absences on the agenda are considered important and the analysis examines who is represented as having a legitimate voice in the policy debates. In this work I use the idea of dominating discourses to refer to the normative assumptions that appear repeatedly in different authoritative official policy documents. In the following sections I will explain more in detail how I analyze dominating gender discourses by means of a textual analysis of policy documents.

4.4 Framing gender inequality as a policy problem: textual analysis

I analyze discourses surrounding gender inequality by means of a textual analysis of authoritative official policy documents. It should be recognized that since I adopt a top-down perspective, and the analysis is delimited to written sources, this means that I not analyze discourse in terms of practice or the way in which subjects reproduce, challenge and change dominating discourses (Dahl 2000: 330). The textual analysis draws upon Critical Frame Analysis developed within the European research project MAGEEQ and, later on, QUING. In fact, the process of elaborating this research project took its beginning in my work as a researcher in the MAGEEQ project where I examined the framing of gender inequality in Spanish family policy (Bustelo et. al. 2004; Peterson 2007b). Later on, I would participate in the QUING project analyzing the issue of gender inequality within policies related to employment and care in Spain (López, Peterson and Platero 2007; Peterson and Orozco 2008; Forrest et. al 2009). Some of the material that I analyze in this study also formed part of the MAGEEQ and QUING material. My participation in these projects has informed this work, not only in terms of the general methodology but also in terms of the specific textual analysis that I carried out for this study. It is necessary to account here for the research process which involved both the adoption of a particular kind of textual analysis proposed by Critical Frame Analysis and the redefinition of some of the aspects of this textual analysis in the context of my project, developing a feminist welfare state analysis.

4.4.1 The research process

The starting point of Critical Frame Analysis is the awareness that there are multiple ways of framing gender inequality as a policy problem and, thus, there are multiple visions of gender equality embedded in problem representations (Lombardo, Meier and Verloo 2009; Bustelo and Lombardo 2007; Verloo and Lombardo 2007; Verloo 2005). Within the above mentioned research projects gender inequality was argued to be a complex and contested problem/concept and the aim was to map the different representations of gender equality in European policy debates. The analysis deals with the concept of gender equality as an “empty signifier” which means that it is open to be filled with different meanings. Within this vein, the framing of gender equality involves “a configuration of positions on various dimensions of diagnosis and prognosis, including positions on roles, on location, on norms, on causality and mechanisms, on gender and intersectionality” (Lombardo, Meier and Verloo 2009: 11). In order to map the different ways of framing gender equality, a guide to textual analysis with “sensitizing questions” (see Annex 1) was elaborated in the MAGEEQ project and further refined in the QUING project. These questions were related to feminist political and theoretical debates and, importantly, issues concerning intersectionality, the private/public dichotomy and voice were emphasized (Verloo and Lombardo 2007).

As I started to develop this research project I analyzed the texts according to the sensitizing questions of the MAGEEQ project. Subsequently, in the QUING project, I would again engage with the questions elaborated in the MAGEEQ project but now in a revised version. The textual analysis involved a process in which each policy document selected for the empirical case studies was analyzed with the sensitizing questions in mind. In the MAGEEQ and QUING projects the analysis of each policy document was referred to as a “supertext”. As for this work, the research process implied that the textual analysis altered as I went along: the supertexts of the MAGEEQ and QUING projects are not the “same” as the supertexts that I used in a later stage of the research in the sense that some of the questions became more important for the analysis and other questions became less important (a selection of the supertexts can be accessed online: <http://www.peterson.es/thesis/docs/>). In the research projects we used “coding” as a method in the elaboration of the supertexts and to identify the main frames on gender equality. We also used summaries to explain the main idea elements (and codes) in the analysis. From the point of view of a constructivist and discourse-oriented analysis, I found that the summaries were more useful for the analysis than the codes which indeed opened up for more quantitative analyses. So, I started to elaborate supertexts where I summarized the main idea elements under each question. I included in the textual analysis the quotes in which I had found the key idea elements (as in the QUING project). Moreover, as I developed the theoretical framework and started to discern the central questions to be inquired in this study, I also redefined some of the questions to be asked to my material. Drawing upon the theoretical discussion regarding intersectionality (see chapter 2), I focused more on political intersectionality, normative subjects and exclusion. Additionally, since this study analyzes the ways in which gender inequality has been framed in the politics of care, I adjusted the guide to textual analysis to incorporate dimensions related to feminist welfare state research (see chapter 3).

Therefore, I adjusted the questions to the context in which gender inequality is constructed.

I organized the sensitizing questions in different clusters with different headings: problem, solution, gender and intersectionality, location and voice. The following questions are central: What is the problem represented as being? What are the solutions represented as being? How is gender and gender equality represented? How are the responsibilities and boundaries of the (welfare) state represented? Who is represented as having a legitimate voice? These questions will be explained more in depth in the sections below, firstly, focusing on problem and solution (diagnosis and prognosis), secondly, focusing on the dimensions of gender and intersectionality and, thirdly, paying attention to location (related to the private/public distinction) and voice. The complete set of questions that oriented the textual analysis in this study can be found at the end of this chapter.

The textual analysis carried out for each policy document contributed to the more general inquiry surrounding normative assumptions and silences. Even though each text analysis was an important contribution to the analysis, at a later stage of the research process, I scrutinized the textual analyses all together. I often turned back to the original text in order to contrast it with the supertext as well. Sometimes I would then come to question my own interpretations and re-interpret the main elements of the texts. In this phase of meta-analysis I started to focus more on discerning the underlying logics, drawing upon Carol Bacchi (1999, 2009a) and Nancy Fraser (1989). In other words, I examined the normative assumptions that seemed to inform the problem representations. What are the underlying norms that underpin the problem representations? Dominating discourses were identified by means of revealing the normative assumptions underpinning problem representations. Dominant problem representations were, in turn, identified by distinguishing the essential idea elements that appeared in a variety of policy documents. The meta-analysis also focused on what was left unproblematic by asking: What are the silences? And what are the effects produced by this way of representing the problem? The analysis of underlying norms goes along with the identification of normative subject positions. Problem representations were scrutinized from the point of view of which subject positions were privileged and which subject positions were excluded or marginalized. The analysis of norms and silences will also be further explained in a section below.

There is no subject outside discourse and, therefore, it is crucial to continually scrutinize our own normative understandings by means of a process of *reflexivity* (Bacchi 2009a; Lombardo, Meier and Verloo 2009; Rönnblom 2005). Foucault's work suggests that we need to question our own categories of analysis (1966) and, as Bacchi suggests (2009a), one way to do this is to draw upon a wide variety of feminist perspectives in order to lessen the possibility of adopting taken-for-granted cultural and/or class-based presuppositions. Within this vein, I explore different feminisms and the concept of intersectionality in chapter 2. Feminist theory and research that question the white, heterosexual, middle-class norm is useful in order to challenge taken-for-granted interpretations. Critical approaches have contributed to reveal the norm of white heterosexual working mothers in welfare state studies. Reflexivity involves reflecting upon the historical and conceptual legacies of the concepts we use, such as the concept of gender equality (see chapter 2). In accordance with the work of Malin Rönnblom (2005)

and Eva Magnusson, Malin Rönnblom and Harriet Silius (2008), I have tried to avoid taking one concept of gender inequality as the “right” one. The aim is to critically scrutinize the different problem representations, from the point of view of underlying normative assumptions and silences.

4.4.2 Analyzing problems and solutions: diagnosis and prognosis

In the following sections I will explain the questions that guided the textual analysis. First, in this section, I focus on the questions related to problems and solutions. In the next section I focus on the questions related to gender and intersectionality. Finally, I turn to questions linked to location and voice.

The textual analysis asks questions on “diagnosis” and “prognosis”: *What is the problem represented as being?* To discern the problem representation the analysis asks related questions: *Why is it a problem? What are the causes? What mechanisms reproduce the problem? Who is responsible? Who is the problem holder? Who is the norm group?* Then the analysis inquires: *What are the solutions represented as being?* To answer this question the analysis explores interrelated questions: *What are the goals? What mechanisms are presented to solve the problem? Who is acted upon? Who is responsible to solve the problem?*

The multiple interpretations of gender-related problems can be linked to a range of different policy measures and thinkable solutions in different contexts. Policies surrounding prostitution provide an illuminating example of disparate problem representations and solutions. While Dutch policies represent prostitution as a regular type of paid work, the Swedish policies represent prostitution as violence against women making paying for sex a crime (Outshoorn 2001). Definitively, the policy problems and solutions are constructed very differently in different countries.

Drawing upon Snow and Benford (2000, 1988), the research projects of MAGEEQ and QUING considered a policy frame to have a typical format related to politics and policy-making and, hence, being structured in a diagnosis and a prognosis of the issue in stake (Verloo 2004: 9). The diagnosis of the policy problem involves identification and naming of a problem; the prognosis suggests goals and strategies to solve the problem. Within the dimensions of diagnosis and prognosis emerge explicit or implicit representations of who the problem-holders and problem-solvers are, how and to what extent gender is related to the problem and solution, what the causes of the problem are, what the means are to solve it, and where the problem and solution are located (Verloo 2005: 25).

Discourses on gender (in)equality involve diverse positions in terms of diagnosis and prognosis. Mieke Verloo and Emanuela Lombardo (2007) offer an illustrating example. They explore how the strategies of inclusion, reversal, and displacement construct differently the problem of gender inequality and its solutions (2007: 33). The diagnosis of the problem of gender inequality is, for the vision of inclusion, the exclusion of women from the political or the economic sphere, for the vision of reversal, the existence of a male norm, and for the vision of displacement, the gendered world itself. The three strategies diverge in the suggested solutions, as the vision of inclusion

represents the inclusion of women in the existing world (in politics and in the labour market) as a possible solution, while the vision of reversal constructs a solution that challenges the existing male norm by incorporating women's perspectives (for instance, revaluing of care work), and the vision of displacement proposes to deconstruct political discourses that engender the subject, going beyond the dichotomy man/woman, masculine/ feminine.

Similarly, discourses surrounding care and domestic work involve different positions on gender (in)equality in terms of diagnosis and prognosis. The strategies of inclusion, reversal, and displacement construct differently problem and solutions surrounding the connection between gender inequality and care work and domestic work. For this example, I draw upon feminist economist Drucilla Barker (2005) who critically examines how care and domestic work are interpreted as a problem by liberal feminism (which can be related to the strategy of inclusion) and socialist feminism (which can be related to the strategy of reversal). Both the model of inclusion and the model of reversal use gender as a social construction that assigns certain tasks and responsibilities to women and other to men. Both strategies consider women's subordinate role in paid labour markets as restrained by their primary role in unpaid household labour. However, the strategy of inclusion focuses on the problem of women's unequal participation in the labour market and gender inequality is considered to diminish as women participate in paid work as men do. The strategy of reversal focuses on the problem of exploitation of women's unpaid care and domestic work and it attempts to valorize work typically associated with women's work. From both perspectives, gender equality is linked to men's sharing of care and domestic work but the motivations are different: in the liberal view the goal is to increase women's participation in the labour market and in the socialist view the goal is to revalue the work women have traditionally done.

Barkers' own analytical approach can be linked to the strategy of displacement. She argues that we need to acknowledge the instability of the category "women" and analyze the ways in which gender, race, class, sexuality and nation constitute meanings, content, and economic valuation of the work that women do (2005: 2191). Nevertheless, this strategy is primarily an analytical one, more complicated to translate into political strategies and policy measures. It can therefore be expected that policies adopt inclusion and/or reversal perspectives on care.

The textual analysis also explores the balance in the text: *What elements are emphasized? What are the tensions and contradictions?* I emphasize the interconnectedness of the diagnosis and the prognosis as I see these two dimensions as intimately intertwined; a policy measure can be seen as having an implicit or explicit interpretation of what the problem is, and a problem representation involves ideas about what the feasible solutions might be. I underline the dominating narratives that, in turn, involve different positions on dimensions of diagnosis and prognosis²⁵. I am particularly interested in the normative assumptions underpinning specific problem representations and their proposed solutions. However, discourses entail contradictions (Magnusson, Rönnblom and Silius 2008: 9) and, hence, the textual analysis draws attention to the dimensions of diagnosis and prognosis separately in order to reveal contradictions within

²⁵ As I consider diagnosis and prognosis as inherently intertwined, the presentation of the analysis does not follow the schema of "diagnostic" framing and the "prognostic" framing proposed by Snow and Benford and used in the MAGEEQ project.

the discourse, between what is considered problematic and the offered solutions. Hereupon, the analysis can reveal contradictory effects of the welfare state (Kantola and Dahl 2005: 51). Next, I will explain the analysis of gender and intersectionality.

4.4.3 Analyzing gender and intersectionality

The textual analysis then asks: *How is gender inequality represented? What are the visions of gender equality?* For this, the analysis explores other closely connected questions: *How are gender and other social categories represented in relation to the problem? How are gender and other categories represented in the proposed solutions?* These questions are intimately related to the theoretical discussions on gender and intersectionality presented in chapter 2.

As Verloo and Lombardo (2007) show, gender in itself is framed differently depending on what the normative assumptions are. For instance, the model of inclusion tends to adopt the norm of gender neutrality and to treat women as if they were equal to men. The strategy of reversal argues that the norm of gender neutrality reflects dominant male perspectives and that women's difference from men needs to be recognized and valorized. The vision of displacement seeks to deconstruct the fiction of the category "women" and challenges the category of gender for being based on a fixed man/women dichotomy which may actually contribute to generate further inequalities. Politics of diversity is proposed as an alternative to both equality and difference.

As I have argued earlier, the analysis of gender is inseparable from that of intersectionality. In other words, one cannot understand gender without intersectionality. As Judith Butler argues, it is impossible to separate gender from the political and cultural intersections in which it is produced and maintained. The category "women" is normative and exclusionary and it is invoked with the dimensions of class and racial privilege intact. The presumed unity of the category women obscures the multiplicity of cultural, social and political intersections in which the concrete array of women is constructed. The ideas attached to the concept of intersectionality have a long history within feminist thought, including Black feminism, queer theory, post-structural and post-colonial theory. The analysis of intersectionality can reveal the ways in which policy discourses construct other categories "beyond gender" such as class, ethnicity/race and sexuality as part of the problem and the solution (or not) (Lombardo, Meier and Verloo 2009: 10).

I use Kimberly Crenshaw's (1989) concept of political intersectionality as an analytical tool for feminist welfare state research. As we have seen, this concept refers to how inequalities and their intersections are relevant at the level of political strategies. Crenshaw shows how both sex discrimination policies and race discrimination policies have tended to marginalize the experiences of black women privileging the experiences of white women and black men respectively. A question referring to political intersectionality is: How and where do gender equality policies marginalize "other" women? An important aspect is to disclose the ways in which the discourses provide certain subject positions at a given time and in a given context (Dahl 2000: 72).

The QUING project emphasized the dimension of intersectionality more explicitly than the MAGEEQ project. Still, in the QUING project doing intersectional analysis

tended to involve looking for “difference”, identifying how and when policy texts addressed non-privileged women suffering from “other” inequalities. The intersectional approach that I adopt is an analytical tool which indeed is useful in order to “map the margins”, but also to critically examine the norm group, analyzing how certain categories of men and women become privileged subjects within policy discourses (Staunæs 2003). This implies, for instance, a focus on how ethnocentric and hetero-normative dimensions of gender equality are constructed in different contexts (Rönblom 2005: 248).

A methodological difficulty of the analysis of gender and intersectionality is how to analyze absences. The absence of men in the framing of gender inequality in debates on care and domestic work reveals a silence on power relations and gives us an idea of who is considered the norm group. In the case studies a common category is that of “working mothers” which is a category associated with a hetero-normative discourse and an assumption of white, middle/upper-class women. Still, the norm of white, middle-class women can sometimes only be deduced by the absence of “other” women; women making a “difference”. Another example is that, according to academic studies, we can see grandmothers as a key category in care work in social practice in Spain, but grandmothers are hardly ever explicitly referred to in the discourse. The Spanish welfare state attributes unpaid care work to grandmothers, but not because of what it *does* but because of what it *does not* do, that is, not assuming responsibility for care. How can we understand silence? I think that in order to grasp the implications of absences on the agenda it is necessary to continuously relate the discourses to the specific national contexts in which they emerge, drawing upon previous research.

4.4.4 Analyzing location and voice

As for location, the textual analysis asks: *Where is the problem located? Where is the solution to the problem located?* These questions mainly refer to the different spheres of the state, the market and the family. The analysis also examines the following, closely related questions: *Are care and domestic work private or public problems? Is the solution represented as a private or public matter?* These questions draw upon the insights of feminist welfare state studies and the critical assessment developed in chapter 3.

An important feminist debate revolves around the gendered dichotomy of the public and private, related to the dimension of location. Feminists have struggled for a wider definition of the political, turning issues that were previously represented as private into public problems, for instance, the problem of violence against women, reproductive rights and sharing of care and domestic work between women and men (Verloo and Lombardo 2007: 28-9). Feminists have shown that the so-called private sphere is political because problems that are labelled as personal are indeed regulated by the state and are (re)produced by political means. Public policies may construct care as a state responsibility, as a collective responsibility shared by women and men or as an individual responsibility. The latter reinforces the perception that women’s work is a private matter belonging to the private sphere of the home. The narrative of the public and private tends to mystify the ways in which the state is intervening all the time in the shaping of our

lives, when it legislates and when it fails to legislate, when it provides social services and when it does not (Bacchi 1999).

In the research projects MAGEEQ and QUING location was not related to feminist welfare state studies, so I have redefined the meaning of this analytical dimension²⁶. Discourses construct the boundaries of the welfare state; they construct problems as private or as public concerns and they locate the solutions in private and/or public spheres. I examine the ways in which care and domestic work are constructed as a responsibility of the state or the family and when and how market solutions are emphasized. Gender inequality is considered here in relation to the construction of the welfare state. The analysis highlights the ways in which policy discourses legitimize (or de-legitimize) the welfare state in relation to the problem of gender inequality. Policy discourses on care and domestic work are interesting to study in that they define and legitimate certain issues as private problems and other as public. Such articulations of private and public problems obviously have material effects on women and men and will also have divergent effects on different categories of women. There is a continuous negotiation of what problems are public problems and what problems are and should be private problems. This involves constant shifts in the boundaries of the welfare state. I focus on the changing boundaries of the welfare state and, particularly, on the discourses that construct these boundaries (Kantola and Dahl 2005). For instance, while Spain has extended the responsibilities of the welfare state in the name of gender equality (until the economic crisis 2008), the Swedish debates seemed to be shifting away from the discourse on the women-friendly welfare state reinforcing freedom of choice and market solutions (Peterson 2011).

Finally, the textual analysis asks: *Who is considered a legitimate voice?* The dimension of *voice* suggests analyzing who has a voice in a given debate, in the articulation of a specific policy problem, and who is excluded. It refers to the extent to which groups are being treated as an actor with voice, with agency, and not merely as an object discussed by others (Ferree et al. 2002: 12). The voice analysis can adopt different perspectives. Firstly, voice can be about who is speaking in the text, who is the author of the policy text. Nevertheless, policy analysis differs from the analysis of social movements in that they do not always originate in specific actors, but emerge in institutions such as administrations or cabinets, committees or spokespersons (Verloo 2005: 25). Secondly, voice can be about the actors that have been involved in the process of agenda-setting and articulation of a specific policy problem, which would imply studying, for instance, the role and influence of the feminist movement in the shaping of the agenda. This perspective is consistent with the idea of strategic framing discussed before. Textual analysis of policy documents would, however, not be enough in such a study. This study does not encompass an analysis of the influence of different actors on the agenda.

A third perspective on voice can be about who appears as a subject and who is constructed as having a legitimate voice in the discourse. This is the analytical approach adopted in this study and, hence, the voice analysis draws upon the theoretical debates regarding intersectionality and subject positions. It should be acknowledged that this

²⁶ In the research projects MAGEEQ and QUING location referred to the following three spheres: the organization of citizenship, the organization of labour and the organization of intimacy (Verloo and Lombardo 2007; 2005).

implies delimitation of the voice analysis and differs from the QUING project that focused on the actors involved in the articulation of policy problems. Nevertheless, the perspective adopted here is useful to expose processes of inclusion and exclusion and is coherent with the analysis of normative assumptions and the effects of discourse. In addition, when re-constructing the context of the case studies, I draw upon secondary material in order to say something about whose voices have been heard and whose voices remain unheard in the policy debates.

4.4.5 Analyzing norms and silences

In a later stage, the textual analyses were all scrutinized with a focus on normative assumptions and silences. The overall purpose was to analyze the way in which gender inequality has been framed and given certain meanings in the politics of care, while other meanings have been obscured. For this purpose I scrutinized the textual analyses asking the following questions: *What are the normative assumptions underpinning the problem representations? What do such assumptions exclude or marginalize?*

Here, the dominating narratives and their silences were in focus. The aim was to reveal the dominant discourses, the normative subjects of gender equality policies, and processes of exclusion. Inspired by Carol Bacchi (1999, 2009a) and Nancy Fraser (1989) I identified the normative assumptions that seemed to underpin the problem representations. By revealing the recurring normative assumptions I could get an idea of what dominating discourses informed the framing of the problem of gender inequality. By the same token, I also focused on the silences, on what was left unproblematic and without questioning.

Why are norms and silences interesting for feminist welfare state analysis? In chapter 3 on feminist welfare state research I assessed the notion of the women-friendly welfare state. As we have seen, women have been represented as a homogenous group which, in contrast to men, share the same interests in welfare state policies and care provision. Following from this, women have been constructed as being liberated or restrained by the state and its social policies in the same way. Certainly, gender has often been conceptualized in terms of the binary women/men in comparative feminist welfare state studies. As argued before, the notion of the women-friendly welfare state involves an exclusionary vision of gender equality defining the problem of gender inequality as a problem only for white, heterosexual, working mothers. Women's labour market participation often appears as the key to gender equality which reveals a middle/upper-class bias. I have also assessed the idea of the women-unfriendly welfare state embedded in the strong male breadwinner model. This model builds upon an exclusionary norm, considering the problem of gender inequality to be mainly a problem for white, middle-class, heterosexual mothers. Working-class women, who always participated in formal or informal labour markets, have been marginalized in this model. By focusing on the processes by which meanings and categories are constituted, the analysis raises questions about what the dominant visions of gender equality are, who the subject of gender equality policies is, and what elements, issues and/or groups are excluded or marginalized.

In the section on dominant gender discourses I have already discussed research that illustrates the need to analyze underlying norms and examine their effects. Malin Rönnblom's (2009) analysis reveals the significance of economic growth as an unquestioned norm in Swedish gender equality policies. As she argues, economic growth entails a dominant narrative of progress which informs the framing of gender equality. In a similar vein, Robina Mohammad (2005) shows how the dominant discourse on gender equality in Spain has been associated with a modernity project privileging certain categories of women. The home has been constructed as oppressive while paid work has been viewed as the key to emancipation ignoring the precariousness of the work world. Modern, middle-class, working women have been seen as the key to national progress as opposed to "traditional" women. These studies point at the importance of a critical approach that questions what is taken for granted, such as economic growth, progress and modernity.

The analysis of underlying norms goes along with the identification of normative subject positions. As such, intersectionality is analyzed in this study by means of an examination of normative assumptions and exclusionary visions articulated in policy discourses. Within this vein, I study the ways in which the discourses provide certain subject positions in specific historical contexts and how policies construct gender and its intersections with, for instance, class, sexuality and race/ethnicity.

4.5 Contrasting case studies

The comparison between Spanish and Swedish policy debates (1995-2010) serves to illuminate the problem of gender inequality in the context of changing European welfare states. Gender and welfare state research has concentrated on comparing the policies of welfare states, either across regimes or within regimes. Given the prevalence of quantitative and positivist comparative research, qualitative and discourse-oriented comparisons have been marginal, also within comparative welfare state research. Feminist comparative welfare research tends to focus on institutions and policies but not discourses. In contrast, this study involves an examination and comparison of the discourses that construct gender inequality as a policy problem and legitimize the boundaries of the welfare state. The comparison is helpful in order to reveal both shared normative assumptions and context-related silences. In other words, the contrast between the two case studies is useful in pinpointing both dominant discourses and what is not being problematized in each context. The research process involved, firstly, the analysis of each case study and, secondly, the cross-country comparison. The Spanish case study was developed first and part of the material was analyzed within the MAGEEQ and QUING research projects. The Swedish case study was developed later on, as a contrasting case study.

4.5.1 Comparisons

In political science comparisons are often regarded as generating a better understanding of different societies and their institutions, and as helping scholars to avoid ethnocentrism (Mackie and Marsch 1995). Traditionally, comparative analysis has aimed to develop explanations and test theories of the ways in which political processes work and the ways in which political change occurs. The logic of comparative methods used by political scientists has been close to those used in natural sciences (Almond et al. 2000, in Rönnblom 2005), with the purpose to objectively describe, explain, evaluate and predict political change and events. The comparison often aims to “rank”; to find out what is best in relation to an implicit or explicit goal. Within this vein, studies have been criticized for making comparisons when concepts attain different meanings in different contexts (Kantola 2006: 39). This kind of comparative approach fits badly with a social constructionist approach where cross-country differences in meanings are seen as an interesting point of departure, rather than a problem. And, as Malin Rönnblom argues, the context is crucial, and so what is deemed a success in one country may as well be considered a failure in another (2005: 241).

I have developed two case studies and the methodology pays attention to heterogeneity within the states, to competing representations and conflicting meanings in each case. As David Howarth (2000) contends, when comparing discourses, the cases to be compared need to be described, analyzed and interpreted first on their terms, as singular instances with their own specificity. As for this study, in order not to overemphasize the significance of differences and similarities in the studied countries, it has been important to elaborate in-depth analyses of each case study and highlight the way in which the national context informs specific ways of framing gender inequality as a policy problem. But the comparative analysis is indeed helpful to better understand each case, and the case studies can provide new questions that can be asked. By reading one case study through the other, new dimensions in the material appear (Rönnblom 2005: 246). The purpose of the comparison is to further our understanding and explanations of dominant discourses in different historical contexts, not to construct generally applicable laws of social and political behaviour (Howarth 2000: 138-9). In other words, the aim of the cross-country comparison is not to discover empirical relationships among variables while all other variables are held constant (Lijphart 1971: 683). Rather, the aim is to illuminate a phenomenon that these societies share and to engage in relevant theoretical debates (Reinharz 1992).

In this case, the phenomenon refers to the problem of gender inequality, and the aim is to engage in and contribute to theoretical debates regarding gender and the welfare state. The case studies are analyzed from a comparative perspective to highlight differences and similarities, shared normative assumptions and context-bound silences. The comparison demonstrates the situated and context-specific nature of knowledge (Kantola 2006: 22). Discourses are in constant interaction with the context in which they are articulated, and the comparison of Spanish and Swedish debates illustrates how problem representations are interlocked with the national context in which they emerge. A comparative approach is a way to find context-bound silences, which can be illustrated through the comparison of domestic service debates in Spain and Sweden, since this issue

has been a marginal problem in Spain and a controversial policy problem in Sweden. By in-depth policy analysis we can reveal what discourses are marginalized and, thus, the context-bound silences. What is taken for granted is thereby contested. The idea is to highlight both differences between the welfare states and differences within them.

Some methodological difficulties should be pointed out here. For instance, comparing discourses requires a deep understanding of the language and culture of the countries under study (Hantias and Mangen 1996, in Kantola 2006: 39). The language is considered part of the conceptual system, reflecting institutions, norms, values and practices. In this study I have translated the Spanish and Swedish material into English, which has indeed implied a process of reflection on the construction of meanings. Certain ideas and concepts seem inseparable from the national contexts in which they emerge and the nuances in their meanings may be lost in translation²⁷. I am aware that the richness of language and its meanings not always can be grasped in the process of translation.

My relationship with Spain and Sweden is that of both an “insider” and an “outsider”. I draw upon my “insider” knowledge and understanding of Spain and Sweden. Swedish is my native language and I have lived in Sweden the greater part of my life, but I have also spent 9 years in Spain and, additionally, some time in other Spanish speaking contexts in Latin and Central America. By living abroad I have gained some distance from my own country, which is now my object of study. Such a distance can be useful as I start to see things from the perspective of an “outsider”, which can give way to questions and perspectives that would otherwise not be possible (Kantola 2006: 42). At the same time, in Spain I am also, to some extent, an “outsider”, often interpreting events and policies on the basis of my Swedish background, particularly in issues related to the welfare state. Of course I have to recognize that the “outsider” perspective can also imply a restraint in so far as it may delimit the understanding of the national context and multiple meanings of concepts.

4.5.2 The case studies

The two case studies, Spain and Sweden, are here situated within the context of welfare state (re)construction. As we have seen in chapter 3, feminist welfare state studies have highlighted the differences between welfare states in the Northern and Southern European countries. Certainly, I have chosen to analyse two very different European welfare states but both of them have shown significant and interesting changes in policies surrounding care work and domestic work in past the fifteen years.

Southern European welfare states traditionally attribute a key role to women’s unpaid work within the family, which has been criticized by feminist scholars. The Spanish welfare state has been characterized as a strong male breadwinner model but studies indicate a shift towards a dual earner model in the context of an (until the economic crisis) increasing participation of women in the labour market, an ageing population and new migration patterns. Research indicates that, rather than public care

²⁷ For instance, *folkhemmet* (the people’s home) in Swedish, and *familia numerosa* (which means large families, a specific and privileged figure in Spanish social policy) in Spanish.

provision, private solutions are still dominant and some refer to the role of “superwomen”, grandmothers and female migrant domestic workers, in getting the care work done. Additionally, the literature on global care chains has focused more on Southern European contexts than Nordic ones since public care provision is scarce and private solutions dominate.

The Nordic welfare state has been characterized as a dual earner model, where both women and men have been entitled to be carers and earners; the aim has been to enable women to become workers and men to become caregivers. An extensive social policy has been directed at more or less all sections of the population on the basis of citizenship (Bergqvist et al. 1999). These policies include extensive and flexible parental leaves and good availability of public childcare services. Elderly care has also been provided through extensive public care provision (Szebehely 2005). Nevertheless, researchers have linked the expansion of the domestic service market in Sweden since the 1990s to the retrenchment of the welfare state (Platzer 2007; Lister et. al. 2007; Calleman 2007). It can be argued that today also Sweden forms part of the global care chain.

As we have seen in chapter 3, the Nordic welfare state model has often set the norm, considered potentially women-friendly, for comparative gender and welfare state research, while Southern European welfare states have been seen as “lagging behind”. In Sweden gender equality has been constructed as part of the national identity, wanting to set an example for other countries and the European Union, whereas in Spain there are tendencies to look at the European Union for good examples and the Nordic countries are sometimes taken as ideal models in welfare state policies. Indeed, Sweden got the award of the most gender-equal state at the Beijing conference in 1995. For many Swedish feminists European Union law has seemed retrograde and Swedish women in the European Union institutions have been key actors in exporting ideas on gender equality policies, particularly in terms of reconciling employment with having a family (Hobson, Carson and Lawrence 2007). In contrast, in Spain state feminism, democracy and modernization have been associated with Europeanization (Mohammad 2005).

Rather than enhancing the idea of women-friendly Sweden and women-unfriendly Spain, this study emphasizes that both the Spanish and Swedish welfare states are in constant flux, and it is essential to look at shifts in discourses on the welfare state in the context of Europeanization, globalization and neo-liberal politics. This constant change is apparent considering the economic crisis that we are now experiencing. Contrasting the Spanish and the Swedish case studies is useful in order to get a better understanding of how gender inequality is framed in the context of the welfare state change. The analysis challenges studies that elaborate typologies and wide generalizations across welfare states and set a specific type of welfare state as the ideal. Therefore, the analysis avoids using Sweden as a normative model. The Swedish case study provides a useful contrast to highlight normative assumptions and silences in the Spanish agenda, and vice versa. In sum, the case studies and their comparison serve to illuminate the problem of gender inequality and gender equality policies in the context of European welfare states. The comparison is valuable to explore what normative assumptions are shared across policy debates and across countries, and what the context-bound silences are.

4.5.3 Selection of policy debates and texts

This study explores how gender inequality has been framed as a policy problem in debates surrounding care and domestic work in Spain and Sweden between 1995 and 2010. In this section I will explain the selection of debates, policy texts and the time frame. The year 1995 is justified given that this was the date of the United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing which represented a milestone in governments' commitment towards "mainstreaming" gender equality in public policies (Bustelo and Lombardo 2007: 14; Verloo and Lombardo 2007: 37). This way the date selected to begin the analysis coincides with the research conducted in the MAGEEQ and QUING projects. The year is also motivated in relation to the national contexts; the debates that are analyzed emerged in the mid 1990s, or later.

The Spanish case is the central case study since it analyzes three different, yet intertwined, policy debates surrounding care and domestic work (see chapter 5). Spanish politics of care has changed in the past decades in the context of an increasing female employment, an ageing population and scarce child care and elderly care provision. I have selected for analysis the following three debates:

- a) the policy debate on *reconciliation of work and family life* mainly focusing on parental leaves and benefits and child allowances,
- b) the policy debate on *dependent care* which is about care for the elderly and persons with disability,
- c) the policy debate on *domestic service* dealing with the (lack of) rights of domestic workers.

The policy debates on the reconciliation of work and family life and dependent care were selected for analysis as they represent issues that emerged as important policy problems on the agenda during the last fifteen years in Spain, and they revolve around care and domestic work. I motivate the inclusion of the marginal debate surrounding domestic service on the basis that it points at important normative assumptions and marginalization in gender equality policies and it sheds light on the legitimation of the boundaries of the welfare state. The debate on domestic service allows for an analysis of the tension produced between gender inequality and other inequalities linked to categories such as class and race/ethnicity. The comparison of the three debates provides a wide notion of how care and domestic work are framed and it allows for an analysis of dominating representations of gender inequality in the politics of care in Spain.

As a contrasting case, I analyze the framing of gender inequality in Swedish debates surrounding domestic service, the so-called "maid debate" (see chapter 6). The selection of only one debate, the maid debate, implies a delimitation of the scope of the analysis carried out in this study. But I argue that the Swedish debate provides an interesting contrast to the Spanish case study. Firstly, this debate encompasses shifting representations of the problem of gender inequality and it deals with the three issues in dispute in the Spanish case study: domestic workers' rights, elderly care and the reconciliation of work and family life. Secondly, it turns domestic service, a marginal problem in Spain, into a contentious gender (in)equality issue with a prolonged debate in the parliament, as well as in the political parties, among the trade unions, feminists and

civil society actors. Thirdly, it reveals a problem representation of gender inequality which hardly appears in the Spanish context, as the debate is crucially about the intersection of gender and class (see Kvist and Peterson 2010; Peterson 2011; 2010). Still, the selection of a single policy debate, the debate on domestic service, must be recognized as a limitation. Moreover, the Swedish case study includes a smaller material in terms of policy texts than the Spanish case.

The period of analysis adopts the time frame of 1995-2010. This period of time is selected to reflect current debates surrounding gender inequality in the context of recent welfare state change in Europe. For the analysis of each policy debate I selected texts according to their relevance in articulating gender inequality as a policy problem in relation to care and domestic work and in the context of the welfare state. In order to select the most relevant policy documents, the history of each policy debate was (re)constructed. The idea of constructing an “issue history” draws upon the methodology of the QUING project where I participated in constructing the issue history of “non-employment” policies in Spain (López, Peterson and Platero 2007). Drawing upon both secondary and primary material, the issue histories narrate the development of the policies and highlight the most important shifts in the debates in the period of 1995-2010. This means that the analysis does not attempt to reflect equally the developments of each year included in the time frame, but rather to reflect the main shifts within this time period. The issue histories have served to select the most relevant policy documents but they also serve to contextualize the analyses. In the Spanish case the issue histories of the debates surrounding the reconciliation of work and family life, dependent care and domestic service are presented as an introduction and a context to the in-depth analysis (see issue histories: reconciliation section 5.2.1, dependent care section 5.3.1 and domestic service section 5.4.1). Similarly, in the Swedish case the issue history of domestic service provides the introduction and the context to the analysis of the maid debate (see issue history section 6.2.1).

The documents submitted to an in-depth textual analysis are mainly acts, government bills, parliamentary bills, parliamentary debates, and government plans and reports. As I explained above, the texts selected were analyzed according to a guide to textual analysis and were organized in “supertexts”. Nevertheless, some policy documents were used more in terms of getting an understanding of the context and served to contrast with the results already obtained through previous text analyses. Other kinds of primary sources have been studied in order to get a better understanding of the context of the debates, for instance, texts from the feminist movement. The texts submitted to analysis are all official authoritative policy texts and can be considered as forming part of state discourses. While the analyzed policy documents are official policy texts, they also represent different types of texts. Political-administrative texts as, for instance, acts and policy plans reflect consensus and are essential for the analysis in order to reveal normative assumptions and dominant state discourses. Political texts such as parliamentary debates reflect the points of conflict and can reveal differences within the state. Parliamentary debates provide interesting material for the analysis given that they have a formal role in political decision-making and, at the same time, they reflect divergences in norms, values and interests. They are privileged discourses in that they stem from a privileged site and these discourses tend to attain particular authority that can be related to scientific discourses (Kantola 2006: 44). The Swedish case study relies more

heavily on parliamentary debates than the Spanish case which will be explained below in relation to the issue history of domestic service.

The texts were selected on the basis of the issue history. In order not to be too repetitive I will not present the issue histories here because they are narrated in the chapters developing the empirical analyses. However, I will briefly explain how I used the issue histories to select texts. I principally included in the analysis all relevant acts and analyzed the connected government bills and parliamentary debates. I also selected policy plans regarding gender equality, family policy, dependent care, employment, citizenship and integration. To a lesser extent, the selection includes speeches, electoral programs and government official reports.

Public debates on gender inequality, related to care and domestic work, have emerged at different times in Sweden and Spain. I will here briefly account for the selection of text in the Spanish case study. Care and domestic work were relatively marginal issues on the political agenda in Spain in 1995, but they have become widely debated since then, mainly in relation to the reconciliation of work and family life and dependent care. The time period of analysis is motivated in the Spanish case since the policy debate on reconciliation became an important issue on the agenda only at the end of the 1990s, but has remained an important issue since then. The issue history of the reconciliation of work and family life has identified important legal shifts since 1995 and I selected for analysis the acts and the government bills and the parliamentary debates connected to the development of the acts. For instance, *Act 39/1999, of 5 November, to promote workers' reconciliation of work and family life* adopted in 1999 was the first act that explicitly addressed the problem of "reconciliation". Other important reforms were related to supporting mothers with small children by means of different types of child allowances. *Act 46/2002* established a tax deduction for maternity and gave working mothers the possibility to apply for a subsidy of €100 per month for each child under 3 years of age. *Act 35/2007* introduced a tax deduction/subsidy of €2500 to mothers with newborn children. Nonetheless, this measure was cancelled later on due to the economic crisis. Moreover, *Act 3/2007, of 22 March, for effective equality between women and men* represented a crucial legal change in the area of reconciliation. The reconciliation of personal, family and work life was a key issue in the act and the individual right to paternity leave was promoted as the most innovative measure. Apart from acts, government bills and parliamentary debates, I selected various national plans for equal opportunities between women and men. These policy plans provide a key instrument for the Spanish state's articulation of gender inequality as a policy problem (Bustelo and Lombardo 2007; Bustelo 2004) and they have been particularly important in articulating the problem of reconciling work and family life (Peterson 2007b). Also other types of policy plans, related to family policy and integration policy, were selected for analysis. Elderly care is a more recent issue on the political agenda in Spain. *Act 39/2006, of 14 December, for the promotion of personal autonomy and care for dependent persons* from 2006 was fundamental for the framing of elderly care as a public problem. Parliamentary debates surrounding the adoption of the act were selected for analysis. Domestic service has been a marginal issue, seldom debated as a policy problem. Here I selected a parliamentary debate and a parliamentary bill from 2005 which aimed to improve domestic workers' rights. Nevertheless, a general reform of the Special Regime is under way with the recent adoption of *Act 27/2011, of 1 December, to up-date, adjust and*

modernize the Social Security System. The integration of the *Special Regime for Domestic Workers* from 1985 into the General Regime of the Social Security system is expected to come into force from 2012 and onward.

Next I will shortly explain the selection of texts in the Swedish case. The period of time of the analysis (1995-2010) is motivated also in the Swedish case. Indeed, Swedish policies on reconciliation of work and family life and on elderly care go way back in time, reaching back to the 1960s and 70s when the Swedish welfare state model was developed, and in 1995 Sweden already had a very established discourse on issues of gender equality and care. However, it was in the mid 1990s that the debate surrounding domestic service (re)emerged, in the so-called maid debate. Proposals for tax credits for domestic services have been widely debated in the parliament since then. The policy on tax credits was finally adopted with the *Tax credit for domestic service Act 2007:346*. The analysis includes the act, the government bill and the parliamentary debate preceding the adoption of the act. Furthermore, I have selected parliamentary debates on the issue of domestic service since the beginning of the maid debate. Although the parliamentary debates were selected on the basis that they dealt with domestic service and gender (in)equality, the issue appeared in very different kinds of debates, for instance, within debates on unemployment, elderly care, the combining of work and family and integration. Hence, as I mentioned above, this debate encompasses representations of the problem of domestic workers' rights, elderly care and the reconciliation of work and family life which are used to contrast with the debates in the Spanish case. In this sense, the analysis contrasts the framing of gender inequality in Spain, where the issues of reconciliation of work and family life and elderly care appeared on the agenda only relatively recently, with Sweden, where the discourse linking gender (in)equality and the problems of combining work and family, and care for the elderly, has a long history. Parliamentary debates were the central material selected for the analysis in the Swedish case which informs the analysis in the sense that it reflects the political divisions more than consensus. Nevertheless, the analysis also attempts to reveal the normative assumptions shared across political parties. In the Swedish case I also include a "typically Swedish" type of policy document: the Government Official Reports. A typical feature of the Swedish model is the idea that social policy should be based on scientific results and, hence, researchers should engage in social reforms. The system of Government commissions has been considered a crucial institution for the consensus building in Swedish politics. Such commissions have involved representatives from different political parties, interest groups, civil servants and academic experts. By diagnosing social and political problems, Government commissions have created discursive frameworks for politics since the 1930s, and in the 1970s when gender equality was institutionalized, Government commission reports laid the foundations for costly welfare reforms (Lundqvist and Roman 2008: 219).

Comparative studies often disguise regional and local varieties, which would point at differences within states. The way gender inequality is framed as a policy problem varies in different regions and localities. A delimitation of this study is that, in spite of important regional differences, particularly in Spain (López 2010; Bustelo and Ortals 2007; Platero 2007), it focuses only on national level policies. Recognizing the importance of local and regional variations, this study does not grasp such "differences within".

4.6 Summary

This study explores the framing of gender inequality as a policy problem in Spain and Sweden (1995-2010). In this chapter, I have presented the methodology that the analysis of gender inequality builds upon. Below, I will summarize the central ideas exposed in the chapter and the conclusions.

This study constitutes a policy analysis and, more specifically, an analysis of problem representations. The social constructivist approach to policy analysis is inspired by Carol Bacchi's "What's the problem represented to be?-approach" which assumes that there are no objective policy problems and that "truths" are constructed within discourse. The analysis examines the representations of policy problems on the political agenda, but the purpose is also to disclose what does not get problematized and to draw attention to the silences in the agenda. In other words, it analyzes dominant representations of gender inequality paying attention to what goes unquestioned.

The methodology draws upon discourse-oriented analyses. As such, it emphasizes the importance of language in constituting reality. Without attention to language and the processes by which meanings and categories are constituted, one only imposes oversimplified models of the world. Our knowledge and views of the world are not reflections of a reality "out there" but rather a product of our own ways of categorizing the world. Policy is here defined as discourse, and discourses can be seen as systems of thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of action, beliefs and practices that systematically construct the subjects and the worlds of which they speak (Foucault 1972; Lessa 2005). Dominating discourses play an important role in delimiting policy; normative assumptions set the limits to the alternatives considered feasible. Within this perspective, power and discourse are closely interlocked since the elaboration of meaning involves the exercise of power. However, discourses are never absolute, they are multiple and contradictory and there is always room for resistance. Power, in turn, is considered both enabling and restraining. In this study I use the concept of framing to refer to the process of constructing meanings of gender inequality. Rather than seeing discourses as intentionally used by different actors for specific purposes, as in the notion of "strategic framing", I use the concept of framing with an interest in revealing normative assumptions and subject positions. While the notion of strategic framing emerges from the tradition of social movement theory and has roots in social and cognitive psychology, this work is inspired by post-structuralist accounts on discourse.

The analysis recognizes that knowledge is situated. Following from this, as a researcher I do not stand outside of representations. Consequently, the analysis does not presume to take an objective position, telling the "truth" about what gender (in)equality really is. The study of gender equality policies does not aspire to objectively evaluate their impact or success, but to critically scrutinize the problem representations drawing upon the theoretical framework and the analytical tools that I develop in these pages.

Subject positions are central to the analysis. As historically specific systems of meanings, discourses form subjects, providing subject positions with which people can identify. Discourses are about what can be said, and thought, but also who can speak, when, where and with what authority. In this study I argue that depending on how social policies define and construct gender and gender inequality in specific contexts, they can be seen as having both empowering and disempowering effects on women. The effects of

discourse can be related to the ways in which subjects are constituted in discourse and, hence, the analysis pays attention to the ways in which discourses privilege certain subject positions and marginalize others. For instance, I consider the exclusionary effects of the discourse that emphasizes the “working mother” as the normative subject of gender equality. The analysis involves exposing the consequences of framing a policy problem in one way or another.

Dominating gender discourses are at the heart of the analysis. Discourses produce and sustain hegemonic power, and feminism has challenged dominant masculine discourses creating spaces for marginal discourses and revealing the ways in which women are positioned as the “other”. Nevertheless, feminism produces its own dominant discourses and so feminist research also contributes to the creation of certain realities, while marginalizing others. Given the exclusionary norms embedded in comparative feminist welfare state research (see chapter 3), I have argued that it is important to develop a feminist welfare state analysis that enables an examination of the underlying normative assumptions embedded in discourses on gender inequality. The analysis of normative assumptions surrounding gender and the welfare state has found inspiration in Nancy Fraser’s approach of the “politics of need interpretation” (1989) although my analysis focuses on the construction of problems rather than needs. As in Fraser’s work, this study aims to make explicit the constructed meanings of gender within social policy, meanings that otherwise tend to remain unchallenged. I also draw upon research that develops critical accounts of gender (in)equality by questioning what is often taken for granted, such as the norms of economic growth, progress and modernity.

I analyze dominant gender discourses by means of a textual analysis of policy documents. I have explained the research process and how it influenced the analysis of the policy texts. The textual analysis draws upon Critical Frame Analysis developed within the European research projects MAGEEQ and QUING. The starting point here is the awareness that there are multiple ways of framing gender inequality as a policy problem and, thus, there are multiple visions of gender equality embedded in problem representations. Gender inequality is considered to be a complex and contested problem and the aim is to map the different representations of gender equality in European policy debates. Within the research projects a guide to textual analysis (*sensitizing questions*) was elaborated in order to identify the divergent ways of framing gender equality. Building upon the methodology of Critical Frame Analysis, I have focused on the questions that I consider more relevant to the analysis developed here. Furthermore, I redefined some of the questions drawing upon the theoretical framework on representations of gender inequality (chapter 2) and gender and the welfare state (chapter 3).

The textual analysis draws special attention to dimensions of diagnosis and prognosis, gender and intersectionality, location and voice. I have explained each of these dimensions of the textual analysis. The following questions are central to my analysis: What is the problem represented as being? What are the solutions represented as being? The textual analysis reveals competing ideas about what the problem is and what solutions are considered feasible. I emphasize the interconnectedness of problems and solutions and underline the dominating narratives. However, the analysis is also intended to reveal contradictions within the discourse, between what is considered problematic and the offered solutions, thereby drawing attention to contradictory effects of the welfare

state. Furthermore, the textual analysis focuses especially upon gender and intersectionality, location and voice. Here the following questions are central: How is gender and gender inequality represented? Where are problems and solutions located? Who is represented as having a legitimate voice in the debate? At a later stage of the research process the joint analysis of all the different textual analyses attempted to identify dominant discourses surrounding gender (in)equality turning the attention to underlying normative assumptions and silences.

The methodology involves a comparative perspective. The study compares the framing of gender inequality as a policy problem in Spanish and Swedish politics of care. Given the prevalence of quantitative and positivist comparative research, qualitative and discourse-oriented comparisons have been marginal. Comparative studies have been criticized for comparing when concepts have different meanings in different national contexts, but here differences in meanings are taken as the point of departure of the analysis. The contrasting case studies serve to illuminate the problem of gender inequality in the context of changing European welfare states. This involves an examination of the discourses that construct gender inequality and that (de)legitimize the boundaries of the welfare state. The comparative approach is helpful in revealing both shared normative assumptions and context-related norms and silences. It serves to pinpoint both dominant discourses and what is not being problematized in each context. I have indeed chosen to analyze two very different welfare states, in the literature represented as the “women-friendly” Sweden and the “women-unfriendly” Spain. But Sweden is not considered the yardstick, the ideal model, rather, the Swedish case study provides a useful contrast to highlight normative assumptions and silences in the Spanish agenda, and vice versa. Additionally, each case study pays attention to heterogeneity within the states, to competing representations and conflicting meanings. Such a comparative analysis challenges studies that elaborate typologies and wide generalizations across welfare states.

The chapter has introduced the case studies and explained the selection of policy debates and policy texts. However, the selection of debates and texts will be explained more in detail in the empirical chapters. I analyze how gender inequality has been framed as a policy problem in European politics of care in the period of time between 1995 and 2010. As such, the analysis examines policy issues that have emerged relatively recently on the political agendas and revolve around care and domestic work, traditionally associated with “women’s work”. The debates selected for analysis in the Spanish case are the reconciliation of work and family life, dependent care and domestic service. I argue that these policy debates can be seen as part of the (re)construction and (de)legitimizing of the welfare state. The Swedish case study takes the debate on domestic service as the point of departure; the selection of the “maid debate” implies a delimitation of the scope of the comparative analysis. But the Swedish debate provides an interesting contrast to the Spanish case study because it reveals current representations of the problem of reconciliation of work and family life and of dependent care, which are analyzed in the Spanish case. In contrast to Spain, domestic service has emerged as a contentious gender (in)equality issue in Sweden and the analysis reveals problem representations of gender inequality which hardly appear in the Spanish context, given that the debate is crucially about the intersection of gender and class. Now, the following chapters will present the analysis of the case studies.

Sensitizing Questions

Full title / Date:

Type of document:

Actor(s):

Context:

Parts of text eliminated:

Voice

Who is considered a legitimate voice?

Diagnosis

Problem:

What is represented as the problem?

Why is it seen as a problem?

What is represented as the cause?

What mechanisms reproduce the problem?

Who is seen as responsible for causing the problem?

Whose problem is it seen to be?

What is the norm group?

Gender and intersectionality:

How are gender and other social categories represented?

How is the problem of gender inequality represented?

Location

Where is the problem located?

Are care and domestic work private or public problems?

Prognosis

Solutions:

What is the solution to the problem?

What are the goals?

What mechanisms are presented to solve the problem?

Who is acted upon?

Who is responsible for solving the problem?

Gender and intersectionality:

How are gender and other categories represented in the proposed solutions?

How is gender equality represented?

Location

Where is the solution to the problem located?

Is the solution represented as a private or public matter?

Balance

What elements are emphasized? What are the tensions and contradictions?

5 Politics of care in Spain

5.1 The Spanish welfare state in change: a context²⁸

The Spanish case study explores how gender inequality has been framed as a policy problem in Spanish politics of care since 1995. Three different but interrelated debates are analyzed: the reconciliation of work and family life, dependent care and domestic service. The reconciliation of work and family life and dependent care represent issues that have emerged as important policy problems on the agenda. The analysis includes the marginal debate surrounding domestic service on the basis that it points at important normative assumptions and marginalization in gender equality policies and it sheds light on the legitimation of the boundaries of the welfare state. The analysis of the three debates enables an examination of dominating representations of gender inequality in the politics of care in Spain.

Before entering the analysis of gender inequality in the three debates, it is necessary to contextualize these debates within the (re)construction of the Spanish welfare state. Therefore, I will briefly explore the ways in which the Spanish welfare state has been represented in welfare state research. I will discuss the ways in which mainstream and feminist welfare state scholars have conceptualized the Spanish welfare state and highlight the linkages between gender, care and the welfare state. This backdrop draws attention to the ways in which care work and domestic work have been historically constructed as women's work in Spain and how Spanish welfare state policies have continued to constitute women as primary caregivers. While studies indicate that Spain is moving away from the male breadwinner model towards a dual earner model with both men and women in paid work, "private" rather than public solutions are still dominant, although shifting in character. With an increasing participation of women in the labour market, an ageing population and shifting migration patterns, studies have pointed at the increasing role of female migrant domestic workers in the context of the "non-caring state". As the developments of welfare state policies regarding the reconciliation of work and family life and dependent care show, the boundaries have shifted from family towards state responsibility, but women carry on performing the lion's share of care and domestic work. In the light of the economic crisis and the subsequent cuts in social spending, it is not likely that the Spanish welfare state will continue to extend state responsibilities in care; rather, the reverse is occurring. This introduction provides the context in which the policy debates emerge. I emphasize the continuous flux; the context is not a static picture. I do not see this context as an "objective reality" that can be used to assess the problem representations; this is my reconstruction of the context drawing upon previous studies and primary material.

²⁸ The Spanish case study has been published in different versions in articles and book chapters; see Peterson 2007a, 2007b, 2009, 2010, 2011.

5.1.1 The Southern European welfare state

I here want to point at what has been represented in the literature as some of the fundamental characteristics and tendencies of the Spanish welfare state. “Mainstream” research on the welfare state has developed different typologies of welfare state regimes and there have been disputes about how Spain and other Southern European welfare states should be characterized. Gøsta Esping-Andersen’s model (1990, 1999) of welfare regimes, with the Liberal, Conservative-Corporatist and Social Democratic regime, did not include the Spanish welfare state. In his later work, though, he argues that Spain should be included in the Conservative-Corporatist model, together with Austria, France, Germany and Italy. In the Conservative-Corporatist welfare state the liberal obsession with market efficiency and commodification has never been pre-eminent and the granting of social rights has therefore not been a seriously contested issue, but social rights are far more limited than in the Social Democratic regime. What predominates in this regime is the preservation of status differentials and rights are attached to the family and class status. There is also a strong link between systems of income maintenance and social rights with employment status. Conservative welfare states are generally shaped by the Church and committed to the preservation of the traditional family. Social insurance typically excludes “housewives”, but family benefits encourage motherhood. Day care services are scarce and the principle of subsidiarity implies that the state will only intervene when the family’s capacities to service and maintain family members are exhausted (Esping-Andersen 1990: 53).

Researchers focusing on the Spanish welfare state and, more generally, Southern European welfare states have criticized the fact that many studies have either excluded these countries from the analysis or ignored their specificity by incorporating them in already established models (Katrougalos and Lazaridis 2003; Flaquer 2000; Moreno 2000; Martin 1997; Rhodes 1997). Only relatively recently, since the mid 1990s, have Southern European welfare states become the specific subject of academic interests. Debates have revolved around the question whether there is a distinct Southern European welfare state model or Southern European countries simply make up a backward “family of nations” within the Conservative-Corporatist model (Katrougalos and Lazaridis 2003; Castles 1993, in Moreno 2000;). While Esping-Andersen recognized the crucial role of the family in Southern European countries without distinguishing them as a fourth model, other scholars have preferred to characterize Southern European welfare states as a fourth welfare state regime. In Stephen Liebfried’s work (1992) the Southern European welfare regime is referred to as the “rudimentary” welfare state, also named the “Latin-Rim”. This welfare model includes Spain, Portugal, Greece and, to a certain extent, Italy as well. What characterizes this welfare state model is the rudimentary system of social protection, a strong influence of the Catholic religion and tradition and a solid presence of the family as a key welfare provider. Rudimentary welfare states are also characterized by their low birth rates, important underground economy, high unemployment and sex-segregated labour markets. Nevertheless, other scholars have preferred to see Southern European welfare states as “distinctive”, rather than “rudimentary”, i.e., lagging behind. Liebfried’s concept has been questioned by scholars who argue that rudimentary is a misleading notion. Mauricio Ferrera’s work (1996: 18) on the Southern welfare model

sustains that the concept rudimentary is confusing since some welfare policies, such as pensions, can be said to be generous even in a comparative perspective.

The essential role played by families in Southern European welfare provision and the role social policies ascribe to families are features that scholars most often expose. The specific ways in which the welfare state interacts with the family as an institution have been seen as distinguishing for Southern European welfare states, and they have sometimes been referred to as “familialistic” (Esping-Andersen 1999). The Southern European welfare states have taken for granted that families should be autonomous in care provision and material support. The “familialization” of social rights is reflected in the legislation which attributes responsibilities towards family members also outside home, which has led to a high exploitation of family resources (Moreno 2008: 10). Remarkably, an ideological commitment to the family and family values coexists with a minimal support to the family through family and social policy (Katrungalos and Lazaridis 2003; Naldini 2000; Esping-Andersen 1999).

Southern European welfare states have also been understood as particularly marked by their history of dictatorship and recent transitions to democracy (Guillén and Matsaganis 2000). Stephan Lessenich (1996) puts forward the notion of the “post-authoritarian” model which draws attention to the implications of rapid changes from dictatorship to liberal democracy. From this perspective, the lack of a system of universal rights linked to a concept of social citizenship indicates an unbalance in the modernization of social policies in the democratic era. Asymmetry in social policy is typical of the post-authoritarian model (Carrasco et al. 1997: 29).

Other scholars have pointed at the problems of typologies and have preferred country case studies and historical accounts of the development of social policy (Moreno 2009; Rodríguez Cabrero 2004). Welfare state typologies ignore differences and complexities within states in favour of simplified and monolithic models (Moreno 2009: 15). The particular development of each country makes it difficult to talk about common patterns within clusters such as the “Southern European welfare state” (Katrungalos and Lazaridis 2003). As I have argued before, welfare state studies based on typologies have tended to take the Nordic welfare states as the norm to which the systems of social protection should be compared to, and many researchers have had an explicit preference for the Swedish welfare state model. Social policy analyst Luis Moreno sees this tendency as problematic because of the confusion between what welfare states should be like and how the welfare state has actually developed throughout history. In a similar vein, Gregorio Rodríguez Cabrero (1998) argues that the view of the Spanish welfare state as a laggard ignores the process of profound changes and modernization of the Spanish welfare state. In this work I am not concerned about whether there is a Southern European welfare state model or not, neither do I want to engage in debates on whether Spain is “lagging behind” or “distinct”. In line with Luís Flaquer, I argue that values, norms and the underlying logic embedded in public policies are important to study in order to understand welfare states (Flaquer 2000: 17). Nonetheless, the studies on the Southern European welfare state are helpful for this study in that they say something about the underlying logic underpinning the Spanish welfare state policies, particularly in terms of the family/state responsibilities in care.

5.1.2 Developing the Spanish welfare state

Country studies have analyzed the development of the Spanish welfare state from the dictatorship of Francisco Franco until today, drawing attention to the different phases of development, different features of the welfare state, and different issues such as inequality, poverty and social exclusion, dependent care, integration and migration. The Spanish welfare state dates back to the times of dictatorship but was strongly influenced by the democratization and the integration into the European Union. Moreno argues that the development of the Spanish welfare state can be depicted in four different stages: a) The modernization of the social and economic policies of the Franco dictatorship; b) The consolidation of the democracy with a development in social policies; c) The integration of Spain in the European Union; and d) The Toledo Pact from 1995 (which dealt with the structural problems related to the Social Security system and its potential reforms) and the subsequent legislative developments, which guaranteed a public pension system and later on consolidated the fourth pillar of the welfare state with social protection of dependent persons. The welfare state is sustained by the four pillars of education, health care, income transfers (including pensions and subsidies to persons “in need”), and social services (including policies on dependent care). However, the increase of social rights has gone hand in hand with a decrease in certain economic benefits and cuts in social spending²⁹ (Moreno 2009: 5-9).

The universalization of social rights, services and economic benefits has been unequal. As in other Southern European countries, cash benefits dominate over social services. Albeit there are universal rights to health care, education and pensions, great gaps exist when it comes to unemployment benefits and social exclusion, and the universalization of health care is incomplete (Rodríguez Cabrero 2004: 81, 114; 1998: 138). For instance, the *General Health Act* from 1986 was committed to the development of a National Health Service which guaranteed the universal access to health care for all Spanish citizens and foreign citizens residing in Spain. But the public system has continued to purchase many of its services from the private sector and third sector, and public expenditure on health hardly increased with the universalization of coverage (only 0.5% between 1980-1993) which questions the quality of the provided care (Moreno 2000: 153)³⁰. Private service provision financed by the state is common not only in health care, but also in education, elderly care, integration of migrants and social exclusion. In a context of cutting social spending, the welfare provision by the private sector and the “third sector” (NGOs and religious charity organizations like Cáritas and the Red Cross) has led to the configuration of a welfare state of mixed character (Marbán 2007; Rodríguez Cabrero 2004: 115). Religious institutions have traditionally played a crucial role in the provision of welfare in Spain (Rodríguez Cabrero 2004: 81) but the role of the Church as the main organizer of social protection has diminished (Moreno 2000: 147). Social policy has primarily aimed to avoid social exclusion, establishing minimum

²⁹ For instance, in 2006 the social spending in Spain was 21% of the GDP while the average in the European Union at that time was 27% (Moreno 2009: 5-9).

³⁰ It is notable that the right to basic health care was extended to undocumented migrants in 2000 with *Ley Orgánica 4/2000, de 11 de enero, sobre derechos y libertades de los extranjeros en España y su integración social* (Moreno Fuentes 2007).

economic standards, not to provide social citizenship rights (Carrasco 1997). Means-tested benefits address poverty and social exclusion, but such non-contributory welfare programs have been linked to stigmatizing of its beneficiaries (Moreno 2000: 159).

A crucial feature of the Spanish welfare state is its decentralized character. Social provision is decentralized both at the level of formulation and the level of implementation (Moreno 2009, 2000; Ferrera 2005; Rodríguez Cabrero 2004, 1998). According to the 1978 Spanish Constitution, social assistance is a competence of the 17 regions, *Comunidades Autónomas*, which have made use of this power for institutional legitimization (Moreno 2000: 156). An issue that has received much attention is that of the difficult coordination between the central state and the *Comunidades Autónomas*. Since the regional governments have important responsibilities in social policy, this leads to a great variation in social protection across regions (Rodríguez Cabrero 2004: 115; Rodríguez Cabrero 1998: 139). The decentralized nature of the welfare state risks exacerbating regional disparities in welfare provision. For instance, there is no nationwide safety net guaranteeing a minimum income, only that provided by *Comunidades Autónomas* consisting in minimum-level means-tested benefits for specific categories of persons in need (Threlfall and Cousins 2005: 212). Only the Basque Country can be said to have a genuine subjective right to a minimum income (Ferrera 2005: 18).

The economic globalization has put restraints upon the Spanish welfare state as on other welfare states, favouring flexible labour markets, cutting down social spending and promoting privatization of services (Rodríguez Cabrero 2004: 149). By the same token, Europeanization has implied a tendency towards economic convergence with Northern and Central Europe, and this process has implied an emphasis on reducing public spending (Moreno and Pasqual 2007: 36; Moreno 2000: 147). Europeanization of the Spanish welfare state and social policy agenda can also be associated with the influence of the European Union directives and recommendations on reconciliation of work and family life (see Lombardo 2004) and dependent care (see Rodríguez Cabrero 2007). Nevertheless, the European Economic and Monetary Union has exerted pressures for economic rationalization and containment of costs in social expenditure (Katrougalos and Lazaridis 2003). In current times of economic crisis, the European Union and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) put pressure on Spain to reduce social spending and the government has taken controversial measures in the area of labour law and pensions reducing public expenditure of the welfare state (Navarro 2010). Whereas the analysis carried out here focuses on important shifts in the welfare state and gender equality policies, few new measures have been taken in the name of gender equality since the beginning of the crisis in 2007.

5.1.3 From a male breadwinner model towards a dual earner model

We now turn to the question of the gendering of the welfare state. Feminist scholars have drawn the attention to how women, as long as they do not participate in the formal labour force in the same conditions as men do, are made invisible in mainstream analyses given that care and domestic work are not integrated in the analyses. As discussed in the

previous chapters, feminist scholars have constructed alternative models and regimes that take gender as a point of departure, such as Jane Lewis's male breadwinner model (1992). The Spanish welfare state has been characterized as a strong male breadwinner model with an ideology of sexual division of labour according to the norm of male breadwinner/female caretaker (Daly 2000). Feminist researchers have highlighted that the Spanish welfare state is characterized by a high degree of familialization, which means that the welfare state assigns important welfare responsibilities to the family unit (León 2002). Thereby, it attributes a key role to women's unpaid work within the family. While care services are scarce, the state counts on the family as a crucial institution to secure citizens' welfare, and women are (re)produced as responsible for care.

The transition to democracy is a key to understand the Spanish welfare state and its gendered implications. The influence of the Church and the legacy of the dictatorship have essentially influenced the development of the Spanish welfare state (Cousins 2005). During the Second Spanish Republic (1931-1936) women obtained the right to vote and laws recognized the right to civil marriage; divorce and abortion were adopted as well. In contrast, the Franco dictatorship (1939-1978) was marked by ultra-conservative policies, with a strong pro-natal ideology and a strong male breadwinner model (Salido 2009: 282). Religious marriage was the only acceptable alternative and the family model enhanced the husbands' authoritarian role and the wives' duty to be subservient. Women were deprived of many of their civil and political rights. The "housewife" was basically the only respectable model for women and domestic work was represented as part of women's natural traits and destiny, together with childrearing (Nuño 2008: 101-2; Tobío 2005: 45-6). Husbands were obliged to provide for their families while wives were responsible for care and domestic tasks; until 1975 married women needed their husband's permission to engage in paid work or to own property (Carlos 2000: 58). This, however, does not mean that women did not do paid work; working-class women often performed paid work in informal work sectors. But the strong male breadwinner norm was established in family, social and labour laws where the family was considered the basic unit of society and the husband was the receptor of benefits. Men were generally the only ones to have social protection and women depended on their husbands for earnings and social protection; men were entitled to social security as workers while women were treated as dependent wives and mothers. Social protection was used more as a control mechanism than as a mechanism to promote social citizens' rights or equality (Cousins 2005: 56-73; Carrasco et al. 1997: 220-1). Family policies reinforced the traditional distribution of authority and power within the family, between men and women and between generations, and reinforced family and kin responsibility. A "family wage" policy involved a family allowance paid to the male head of the family; women were only eligible for benefits if they were widows, single mothers or married to men unable to work (Naldini 2000: 71-2). The pro-natal policies involved economic benefits and reduced costs for public services granted to large families (Nuño 2008: 171). Indeed, special benefits for large families (*familias numerosas*) remain still today.

The period after Franco's death involved a rupture with the authoritarian rule and its system of state intervention. During the subsequent decades there have been efforts to "catch up" with other European welfare states, but the legacy of the family policies of the Franco regime had lead to a resistance during many years to speak about the need for family policies, both among left- and right-wing parties (León 2007: 321; Tobío 2005:

47: Carlos 2000; Flaquer 2000: 25). Political actors were wary of family policy that invoked associations with the Fascist regime and its pro-natalism and anti-feminism (Naldini 2000: 87). Thus, for a long time family policies were considered secondary in Spanish politics. It was not until the late 1990s that family issues would enter the political agenda again, and this shift was related to the promotion of such issues in the European Union and by the Conservative government in power since 1996 (Salido 2009: 283).

Researchers have shown how the Spanish welfare state has continued to enhance the norm of the strong male breadwinner model through its public policies. Contrary to the welfare states with Conservative-Corporatist tradition, the family mainly operates in the informal sphere with limited institutional recognition. The absence of welfare services has made it difficult for women to leave home and take on paid work in the formal labour market. The welfare state is cash-transfer biased and, to a much lesser extent, oriented towards social services and, as Margarita León argues, this signals a gender bias in welfare policies which support the strong male breadwinner model (León 2007: 318). While women's movements, state feminist institutions and trade unions in other European countries have mobilized demands for extensive child care policies in the name of supporting working mothers, Celia Valiente argues that such actors have not put forward this demand as strongly in Spain (Valiente 2001: 102, 107). Gender inequalities are embedded in the Spanish taxation and Social Security system. Joint not individual taxation still prevails among married couples (Villota 2008). Married women without formal employment are still made dependent on both husbands' wages and their Social Security rights. Peaks of generosity for those who are in the core sectors of the labour market contrast with meagre benefits in other sectors (Cousins 2005: 74). Since men more often than women maintain a stable relation with the formal labour market, they are favoured by the social protection system based on remunerated work while women, to a large extent, have to rely on social protection that is based on dependence or "special needs" (Carrasco et al. 1997: 161). The hierarchy between productive and reproductive work has been maintained since paid work provides citizens with social protection rights (ibid. 50, 222) while caregivers' needs have largely remained unrecognized by public policy (Threlfall and Cousins 2005).

Without a doubt, important social changes challenge the Spanish welfare state. Studies indicate that the expectations of the Spanish welfare state on women's unpaid work within the family can no longer sustain the weight placed upon it given that the dual earner model is becoming the norm (Anttonen 2005; Martínez Buján 2005; Tobío 2005; Stark and Regnér 2002; Moreno 2000).

With a history of extremely low levels of employment among women during the Franco dictatorship, there has been a constant and rapid increase in women's employment rates since the 1980s, until the current economic crisis. Women's employment rates have increased significantly: from 31.5% in 1992 to 44.4% in 2002 and 54.7% in 2007 (Eurostat 2010). In spite of the increase, women's employment rates are still low in comparison to most other countries in the European Union. Spain exceeded a 40% female employment rate only in 2001 (41.9%) and is far from achieving the "full employment goal" that was established in the European Employment Strategy, aiming at an average rate of 60% of female employment for the EU in 2010. Much of the increase in the labour market participation rates has been related to a rise in short-term employment through fixed-term contracts, which is common among both male and female workers (León

2007: 319). On the other hand, official statistics provide only a partial account of women's paid work since the informal economic sector is a significant source of work for women (Cousins 2005: 174-5; Moreno 2000: 148; Carrasco et al. 1997: 132). In 2007 women's employment rate, for all ages, was 54.7% and men's employment rate was 76.2%. The total employment rate of the whole population was that year at its peak, 65.6%. Spain had not had such a high total employment rate as in 2007 ever before, but then the unemployment has increased drastically in the context of the economic crisis and in 2009 the total employment rate went down to 59.8%. Then the gap between women's and men's employment had shrunk: women's employment rate was 52.8% and men's employment rate 66.6% (Eurostat 2010)³¹.

The Spanish labour market can be characterized by distinguishing three dimensions: the sector of privileged work with high security, temporary fixed-term contract jobs and work in the underground economy (Cousins 2005: 169-72). The public administration, employers and trade unions have negotiated reforms in a context of economic constraints and the result has tended to be a protection of the core sector of the labour market and de-regulation of peripheral sectors. This has led to high levels of precarious flexibility and temporary employment while enhancing the rights of already privileged sectors, mainly civil servants (Rhodes 1997, in León 2007: 330). Part-time employment is generally a common trait of female employment in the EU; in contrast, Spanish women have entered the labour market in full-time jobs rather than part-time jobs (Tobío 2001: 342). María José Gonzalez, Teresa Jurado and Manuela Naldini (2000: 11) argue that in Southern Europe there is a transition between two different gender orders, but "tradition" and "modernity" continue together. Differences between women cannot be ignored; there is, for instance, an important gap between young women in the big cities who more often participate in formal employment than older women in the rural areas.

While women are increasingly participating in paid formal employment, men's participation in care and domestic work has not increased significantly, although studies have shown major changes in attitudes towards the male breadwinner model; while in 1975 more than 80% of men and women considered housework to be a female duty, in 1995 60% of men and women disagreed with the division of male breadwinner and female caretaker (Valiente 2005: 191-2). Existing studies on men's and women's use of time show an overwhelming domination of women when it comes to care and domestic work (Instituto de la Mujer 2008; Martínez Buján 2007; Tobío 2005, 2001). Studies show that women, whether working at home or outside, contribute considerably more time to the household than men: almost five hours a day in average (Valiente 2005: 192). In 1993 women dedicated 7.58 hours a day to domestic work while men only dedicated 2.30 hours. Since then women's time dedicated to domestic work has decreased but men's time has not increased; data from 2006 show that women dedicated 5.59 hours a day to domestic work while men dedicated 2.20 hours to such activities (Instituto de la Mujer 2008: 39). Not all men fit the norm of the male breadwinner, many are unemployed,

³¹ The employment rate is calculated by dividing the number of persons aged 15 to 64 in employment by the total population of the same age group. The indicator is based on the EU Labour Force Survey. Employed population consists of those persons who during the reference week did any work for pay or profit for at least one hour, or were not working but had jobs from which they were temporarily absent (Eurostat 2010).

studying or retired, but they still do less domestic work than women in general (Valiente 2005:193). At the same time, there is a divergence among women along class divisions; working-class women often spend more time performing reproductive work than middle- and upper-class women do. This can be understood in terms of their economic situation that permits their households to pay other women to do the work (Carrasco et al. 1997: 65). There is also a tendency to share care and domestic work more equally between men and women when the economic level is high (Caixeta et al. 2004: 78-9).

The shift towards the dual earner household as the norm has not involved a corresponding shift in policies on child care. The European Union guidelines indicate that child care should be understood as part of the policies and strategies to improve the reconciliation of family and employment. The guidelines for employment policies of member states approved in 2005 recognized the need to improve public child care provision as a prerequisite to increase women's labour market participation (León 2007: 316). In the context of the European Union's child care provision targets, Spain can be said to fulfil the goals for children from three years of age until the age of compulsory education, i.e., six years. On the other side, the goal set by the Barcelona European Council in 2002 is to provide nursery schools for minimum 33% of children under the age of three, while in Spain public provision of childcare for children under three is scarce with great regional disparities (ibid. 320, 333). Hence, there is a vast difference between the coverage of public centres for children over 3 years of age (covering the demand) and the public childcare centres for children between 0-3 years of age, most of which are private (Valiente 1997, in Tobío 2001: 259). There is also a lack of coordination between working schedules and day care centres and school schedules, and the legal framework does not provide solutions for parents in situations when children get sick (Tobío 2005: 232, 360). Child care has been placed in the field of education and the development in this area has been regarded more as an investment in the socialization needs of children than as policies to facilitate parents combining work and care (León 2007; Valiente 2001). At the same time, as Margarita León contends, child care for children between 0 and 3 years of age is scarce precisely because it goes under the domain of social services and not the universal education system. Importantly, there has been a lack of visibility of child care as a policy problem and a lack of specific pressure from the public opinion while other issues have been prioritized in the political agenda (León 2007: 324, 333).

As we will see in the section on dependent care, there have recently been important policy changes in the issue of elderly care in Spain. Between 2005 and 2008 social expenditure on care for the elderly increased from 0.33% to 0.45% of GDP³² (Eurostat 2011). The EU-15 average decreased in the same period from 0.5% to 0.43%. Nevertheless, statistics have shown a clear insufficiency of public support to the elderly; data from 2005 indicate that 4.1% of the elderly over 65 receive home help and the same number has access to homes. When it comes to the "dependent" population that needs help in carrying out all daily life activities, 20.8% receives home-help and 21.0% has access to homes (Martínez Buján 2007: 99). Additionally, the coverage of home-help and old people's homes does not reach the norms set by the legal framework³³. Statistics

³² The indicator is defined as the percentage share of social protection expenditure devoted to old age care in GDP. The expenditures cover care allowance, accommodation, and assistance in carrying out daily tasks.

³³ *Plan Gerontológico Nacional*

indicate that 83.5% of the families caring for the elderly do not receive any kind of support, neither public nor private, and when families do receive some public support it is mainly complementary to family care (ibid. 104). Public support has been primarily directed to those with few resources, those most “needy” in economic terms (ibid. 108).

Birth rates have been decreasing since the end of the Franco dictatorship; from 2.79 in 1976 to 1.35 in 2005 (Instituto de la Mujer 2010). The shift towards the dual earner model in the context of scarce care provision can be linked to the low birth rates; in the last fifteen years birth rates in Spain have been among the lowest in Europe; in 1998 the fertility rate was at its lowest level: 1.16 which was the lowest fertility record in Europe and probably in the world (Castles 2004: 142). Since then birth rates have increased again: 1.38 in 2006 (Ellingsæter 2009: 4).

The analysis of the Spanish welfare state (re)construction during the last fifteen years is captivating in that it can reveal the ways in which the strong male breadwinner model legacy is shifting towards a dual earner model leaving behind familialistic practices (León 2002). This process, however, cannot be taken for granted but has to be studied empirically and there can be contradictory shifts. While studies indicate that the social changes are provoking a shift-away from the strong male breadwinner model toward a dual earner model, the Spanish welfare state, undoubtedly, continues to rely on “private” solutions and the family (Saraceno 2008). Research indicates that public policies related to parenting, child care and elderly care have not involved any significant de-familialization (Campillo 2010). Some scholars refer to new models; Manuela Naldini argues there is a shift from a male breadwinner model towards a “family and kin solidarity model” (2003) according to which the family continues having a crucial role and care responsibilities are transferred within the family, particularly to grandmothers in childcare and daughters in elderly care. New forms of privatization have involved the employment of female migrant workers. Following from this, we can see the transition from family care to “migrant in the family care” (Bettio, Simonazzi and Villa 2006, in Saraceno 2008). Female migrants meet the needs for care ensuring the continuity of the home-based family care model. While high- and average-income families already can afford these services, the cash-for-care allowances can help lower income families to meet the cost. In the next section I will focus on “private” solutions within the context of the “care crisis”.

5.1.4 Private solutions in the context of the “care crisis”

Care has received less attention in Spanish research than in other parts of Europe such as in Nordic and British academic contexts, but the issue is becoming increasingly important also in Spanish academic contexts (Vega Solís 2009). Care has also become a central matter of the Spanish feminist movement. In the mid 1990s the debate revolved around domestic work and was characterized by the antagonistic positions of those who promoted a salary for housewives and those who supported the idea that women should stop doing domestic work. Since then the idea of revaluing domestic work has shifted from a focus on attributing a monetary value to it towards a questioning of social and economic structures and an emphasis on the care crisis. The fight for citizenship rights

has recently been transformed by some feminist groups into a struggle for “careship” rights; *cuidadania* instead of *ciudadania* (Vega Solís 2009; Precarias a la deriva 2004). The focus on inequality between women and men in care work has also shifted towards drawing attention to power relations between women, and specifically working-class and migrant women’s work in the context of the care crisis. We need to be cautious in order not to endorse some kind of nostalgia as we speak about the care crisis. As Christina Vega Solís asserts, what is today in crisis is the historical sexual division of labour of the middle class and the double burden of the working class. Working-class women have always participated in paid work so their practices were different from those promoted by the strong male breadwinner norm (Vega Solís 2009: 28).

The tension created as the welfare state does not provide sufficient solutions for households’ coping with care work leads to “private” strategies to manage making employment and care compatible. Coping strategies to combine care and employment are infinite in the context of the care crisis. Constanza Tobío (2005; 2001) analyzes the coping strategies of working mothers in Spain in a context where the dual earner model is increasingly dominant. She argues that, across Europe, what seems to differ is not so much women’s employment as a trend but the ways in which women, men, families and the state respond to this process. She contends that in Spain there are strong contradictions between the new economic position of women and the traditional social organization of care based on mothers as primary persons in charge of care and domestic work. New employment practices have not been accompanied by sufficient new policies and changing practices in the family.

Many studies emphasize that Spanish women, and particularly working mothers, face the double burden of paid and unpaid work. Full-time housewives are being replaced by double-working women reconciling employment and care. Tobío’s analysis shows that working mothers articulate the involvement in paid work as a way of building new identities as citizens with full rights and rejecting the “old model” of the housewife (2005: 47). At the same time, as Tobío sustains, women’s paid employment is still conceptualized as a “choice” while “family responsibilities” are not conceptualized as such (2001: 342-3). Some scholars use the idea of “superwomen” (Moreno and Salido, 2006; Moreno and Salido 2007): women who manage what seems to be an impossible situation, combining work activities outside and within the household. Although the concept superwomen has been used in other contexts as well, Moreno defines superwomen in the following way: “With superwoman we refer to a type of Mediterranean woman who has been able to reconcile her unpaid work in the home with her more and more demanding professional activities in the formal labour market” (Moreno, 2003 cited in Martínez Buján, 2007: 27).

A fundamental strategy that working mothers employ to manage paid and unpaid work involves women substituting other women: a “substitute mother” (Tobío 2005). Celia Valiente (2001) sustains that there is mistrust of institutionalization of child care in Spain, considering child care centres as the worst option. In this context mothers’ care becomes normative or, in any case, the care of another woman replacing the working mother in the home. In spite of this, the arrangement based on a mother caring for her own *and* others’ children in her own home, relatively common in some other European countries, and common in Sweden before the general extension of public child care, is generally an absent strategy (Tobío 2001: 354). On the other hand, reliance on

grandmothers in child care is an extended practice (Fernández Cordon and Tobío Soler, 2005; Tobío 2005; Tobío, 2001; Quintanilla 2005). This can be related to the fact that the younger generation of women participates to a much greater extent than the older generations in the labour market (Tobío 2005: 13). Many of the grandmothers doing care work have been housewives most of their lives (ibid. 367). Among working-class mothers the reliance on grandmothers is a major strategy given that they have few alternatives. Also middle-class working mothers frequently rely on grandmothers as an alternative to “hiring a stranger” or instead of nursery schools. Upper class mothers usually rely on paid domestic workers, yet grandmothers still play a role (ibid. 350-1). Generally, when children fall ill, the most common solution is to rely on grandmothers’ care since the law provides no general solutions for such situations (ibid. 233). Due to generational changes, grandmothers care work will most likely not provide a model for the future since they will be “working grandmothers”. Definitively, working mothers of tomorrow will have to look for other solutions.

The phenomenon of “global care chains” has been argued to be particularly significant in the Southern European contexts where public care provision is scarce and private solutions often dominate (Anttonen 2005; Salazar Parreñas 2005; Kofman 2001; Anderson 2000; Anthias and Lazaridis 2000). In Spain migrant women workers often bridge the gap between the need for care and the lack of state-provided or affordable private care services. Academic studies have exposed the role of female migrant domestic workers in welfare provision in Spain, pointing at the problem of “women’s liberation” not having gone hand in hand with a reorganization of the gendered division of labour: “the domestic worker replaces her professional (female) employer in reproductive tasks that neither the state nor the partners share” (Oso 1998: 196). Caring for the elderly in private homes has turned into an ever more frequent field of work among migrant women (Escriba and Skinner 2007; Martínez Buján 2005). Certainly, many women between 50 and 60 years of age take care of their elderly parents (Vega Solís 2009: 30). Additionally, elderly women are themselves caring for their spouses (Rodríguez Cabrero 2007: 72). But the cash-for-care schemes dominate over social services and this often means that households with low and average income can use the money to employ a migrant woman to care for their elderly (Vega Solís 2009: 40). Raquel Martínez Buján explores the ways in which the welfare state is intertwined with patterns of migration, linking the ageing population with recent migration processes. She shows that the structure of the welfare state informs the ways in which care work is gradually being commodified and influences the patterns of migration orienting them towards domestic care work (2007: 34). Domestic care work is the dominant means by which elderly care is being commodified in Spain; while 0.4% of caregiving families buy services from private companies, 7.0% employ a domestic worker and 6.1% receive some kind of public assistance (IMERSO 2004, in Martínez Buján 2007: 118). Martínez Buján explains this tendency pointing out that care work is costly if going through private companies and considering that families dedicate to their elderly approximately eleven hours a day. In a context of scarce public services, most families employ a domestic worker to perform care work and, given the characteristics of this market (often situated in the submerged economy) and the workers (mainly migrant women), the families then can require full workday/night availability, yet paying very low salaries (ibid. 140). Currently, care for “dependent persons” most

often characterizes migrant women's initial work experience in Spain³⁴. Also working mothers employ domestic workers as a coping strategy to be able to combine work and family life (Tobío 2005; Lister et. al. 2007). Studies indicate that 54.5 percent of women of high socioeconomic level, 29.5 percent of women of middle level and 11.5 percent of the lower level count on the assistance of domestic workers (Fernández and Tobío 2005; Tobío 2005). Clearly, the employment of domestic workers as a coping strategy is related to class divisions among women, although it can be noted that the figure for women of lower socio-economic background is still quite high compared to other parts of Europe (Peterson 2007). Then, who takes care of the maid's children? (Romero 1997). Migrant domestic workers in Spain frequently seem to count on grandmothers for child care back home, a phenomenon that entails the "global care chain" (see also INSTRAW 2009).

The incorporation of migrants in domestic work in recent years can, to a certain extent, be seen as a replacement of the earlier internal migration of women from poor rural backgrounds to work for well-off families in the big cities (King and Zontini 2000). Spain has rapidly shifted from a country of emigration to a country of immigration (Escriva and Skinner 2008; Williams and Gavanas 2008), and back again - in the context of the economic crisis. Albeit Spanish households' demand for domestic workers has augmented, Spanish women have been increasingly reluctant to take these kinds of jobs (Martínez Buján 2007: 111). Although efforts have been made to impede immigration in general, there have been policies encouraging the entry of migrants inserted in domestic service (Anthias & Lazaridis 2000: 147). The successive modifications of the Aliens Act have established a policy designed to meet demographic, labour and economic needs, and the incorporation of migrants in domestic work has been promoted through a quota system (Lutz 2002; Kofman 2001; Anthias and Lazaridis 2000). In the extraordinary regularization process, carried out in Spain in 2005 by the Spanish Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 32% of the applications were related to employment in the domestic service sector, and 83% of the workers within this sector were women. Hence, in approximately three out of four cases women's regularization was linked to domestic service (CES, 2006 cited in Martínez Buján 2007: 121). According to the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, in 2006 62.2% of the workers included in the Special Regime for Domestic Workers were migrants (Martínez Buján 2007: 3). Domestic workers that work as "live-ins" are today almost exclusively migrants; it has been estimated that 81.3% of domestic care workers working as "live-ins" are migrant women (IMERSO 2004, in Martínez Buján 2007: 121). The jobs are characterized by flexibility, precariousness, poor labour conditions and low salaries (Caixeta et. al. 2004: 84). Domestic service often forms part of the submerged economy, and for undocumented female migrants jobs other than in informal domestic service are hard to find and these women are especially vulnerable to abuse (Kofman 2001: 151). Chiara Saraceno (2008:11) highlights the clashing interests between families and paid domestic care workers. Given that families want cheap labour they can be sceptical about attempts to upgrade this work and about struggles to improve the working conditions and social protection rights. Yet, it should be noted that in Spain, in contrast to other European

³⁴ In 2004 approximately 40% of the domestic care workers employed by households to care for the elderly were migrant women. Since then the numbers of migrant women registered with the Social Security in the Special Regime for Domestic Workers has increased and most likely the percentage of migrant workers caring for the elderly as well (Martínez Buján 2007: 121).

countries like Sweden, Germany and the UK, rights to health care and education are recognized regardless of the legal status (Caixeta et. al. 2004)³⁵. During the 1960s and 70s domestic service was disappearing in Spain and the sector was increasingly professionalized with more limited working days. However, domestic service became more and more important again in the 1990s and onwards, given the demand for child care and elderly care. Nonetheless, the official statistics in Spain do not differentiate between the different types of “domestic service”. Care for the elderly or dependent persons in private households is not separated from performing domestic tasks like cleaning. Therefore, as Martínez Buján contends, it is helpful to use the notion of “domestic care work” to underline the great importance of care work that is ignored when we speak of “domestic work” or “domestic service” (2007: 5, 140). The fact that domestic care work goes under the name of domestic work conceals the widespread need for care workers and the absence of public care services.

Scholars have pointed at the “vicious circle” between the high degree of informal care and private solutions, on the one hand, and the low development of social and family policies, on the other hand. Private solutions through informal networks can be legitimizing little advancement in assuming care as a social and state responsibility, allowing for a limited state intervention (Moreno and Salido 2005; Cousins 2005; Valiente 2001; Flaquer 2000; Carrasco et. al. 1997). The strategies of turning to grandmothers and paid domestic care workers reproduce the association between women and mothering (Tobío 2001: 355), (re)producing care as a women’s issue while men’s care work remains marginal (Tobío 2005: 196). Furthermore, the tendency to solve care problems adopting individual strategies might explain a lack of mobilization around these issues and demands for public action (León 2007: 332).

Next, I will focus on the three debates regarding care and domestic work. Firstly, I explore the policies surrounding the reconciliation of work and family life, then I analyze the debates regarding dependent care and, finally, I turn to the issue of domestic service. Each analysis starts out with a reconstruction of the history of the policy problem.

³⁵ In contrast, Spain has been late in transposing EU Directives on anti-discrimination, and racism has not been tackled on the political agenda (Moreno Fuentes 2007).

5.2 Reconciliation of work and family life: gender inequality as a working mothers' problem

5.2.1 Policies surrounding the reconciliation of work and family life

The issue of “reconciliation of work and family life” has become a salient one in Europe. In the context of the European Union, the concept of reconciliation of work and family life was introduced in the 1970s and was linked to the idea of sharing responsibilities in productive and reproductive work between women and men. Nowadays, the issue of reconciliation forms part of the dominant language of the EU, but it has gradually become associated with liberal market solutions and less with the problem of gender inequality (Stratigaki 2004). The vigorous promotion of reconciliation policies by the European Union occurred at the same time when the Conservative government started to endorse family policy issues in Spain in the mid 1990s (Salido 2008: 289; Moreno and Salido 2007: 106). The following section will present some of the most important policy developments surrounding the reconciliation of work and family life in Spain during the past fifteen years.

Reconciliation policies during the Conservative government of Partido Popular (1996-2004)

During the Conservative government (1996-2004) the problem of reconciliation of work and family life shaped debates surrounding employment, family policy and gender equality. In 1997 the need to develop Spanish family policy was recognized in a parliamentary debate and this resulted in a recommendation to elaborate a family policy plan (Salido 2008: 289-90). The reconciliation of work and family life became after that a recurrent issue on the political agenda. At the same time, the importance of achieving social reforms only through economic growth and stability was underlined. Aspects that were emphasized were individual responsibility, non-government provision, voluntary work and the family (Valiente 2001: 98-9). The family policy was based mainly on reduced taxes and tax deductions for families, and primary instruments of the reconciliation policies were paid and unpaid leaves and tax benefits in relation to labour market participation (Guillén and Matsaganis 2000: 138-9). The period of the Conservative governments was marked by the reclaiming of the role of the family; the Conservative Party regarded the family as the core area for policy intervention, embodying to a large extent the moral standpoints of the Catholic Church (Moreno and Salido 2007: 106). As scholars have previously pointed out and as we will see more in depth in the analysis, the policies that addressed the reconciliation of work and family life tended to focus on working mothers' managing of paid and unpaid work, of “work” and “family” (Salido 2008; Moreno and Salido 2005).

The concept of reconciliation of work and family life was introduced under the title Economy and Employment in the *Third Plan for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men (1997-2000)*. However, it should be pointed out that in the previous plan, the *Second Plan for Equal Opportunities for Women (1993-1995)*, the equal sharing of domestic responsibilities was one of ten central areas together with the equal participation of women in the labour market. In the third plan the issue of reconciliation was articulated as a problem of women's employment, but there was also a measure to recognize women's unpaid domestic work, promoting a study of how to estimate women's domestic work as part of the GDP.

A crucial reform within the issue of reconciliation was adopted in 1999 with the so-called "Reconciliation Act"; *Act 39/1999, of 5 November, to promote workers' reconciliation of family and work life*. Although the problem of reconciliation had appeared in debates before, the Act firmly established the issue on the agenda (Salido 2008: 293). The Reconciliation Act was represented as promoting gender equality. The legislation extended the rights surrounding maternity leave, the right to time off work without pay in order to take care of children or dependent persons in the family, the right to reduce the working day for the same reasons, and the right to breastfeeding leave. The right to unpaid leave for family care involved the right to care for dependent parents due to age, illness or accident (Moreno and Salido 2007: 107). Workers got the right to resume their jobs after a one year period of unpaid leave, and to a similar post after a three-year leave (Guillén and Matsaganis 2000: 132). The Reconciliation Act treated maternity from a health perspective and a non-discrimination perspective, regulating the right to protection during pregnancy against health risks in the workplace, and making dismissals motivated by pregnancy or maternity leave invalid. With the Reconciliation Act women were the exclusive right-holders of parental leave, but the reform involved the possibility of mothers with formal employment to transfer up to 10 weeks (limited to 4 weeks before the reform) of their maternity leave to the father. As a background, it should be pointed out that maternity leave was placed under the responsibility of the Social Security first in 1995. Before that maternity was considered a common illness. The Reconciliation Act can be seen as an advance from earlier legal frameworks in terms of introducing the notion of working fathers doing care work (Prieto 2006: 123). Yet fathers' caregiving was stimulated only at the expense of the rights of mothers who had to give up part of their leave to provide their partners time for care. Definitively, parents were not granted the same rights and did not have the same obligation to care for their newborn children; the notion of childbirth was thus still primarily linked to mothers (León 2007: 326).

The Reconciliation Act transposed the European Community Directives 96/34/EC on parental leave and 92/85/CEE on maternity protection in the labour market. The transposition of the directives into the Spanish law violated the spirit of the European directive which promoted individual non-transferable rights; hence, an individual right to paternity leave, in order to promote a more equal sharing of family responsibilities³⁶ (Nuño 2008; Quintanilla 2005; Lombardo 2004, 2003).

The Reconciliation Act was largely criticized by the opposition parties, the trade unions, the feminist movement and the press. The Socialist Party PSOE and other left-

³⁶ See Lombardo 2004 for an analysis of the Europeanization of gender equality policies in Spain, including reconciliation policies: maternity protection, maternity leaves, parental leaves and part-time work.

wing parties argued that the reconciliation of work and family life cannot be facilitated only through parental leaves and time off work. They criticized the Act for not including care services and for conceptualizing the combining of family and work life as a women's problem. However, all the political parties finally voted in favour of the government bill. Few social actors were consulted in the process of elaborating the Act, which occurred in a context of little public attention (Salido 2008: 297). Nevertheless, the main trade unions Workers' Commissions *CCOO* and General Workers' Union *UGT* promoted an extension of circumstances that would allow workers to take time off work, better protection from (illegal) dismissals of workers on leave, and an increase of care services. The feminist movement largely regarded the Act as merely symbolic since care services were not developed within the new legal framework (Valiente 2001).

In 2001 the *Integral Plan for Family Support (2001-2004)* was adopted by the Council of Ministers. The reforms that would be carried out in the field of reconciliation policies during the government of the Conservative Party were resumed in this policy plan. The plan intended to coordinate and enhance the coherence in family policy measures taken by different Ministries and at different territorial levels, to create a more "family-friendly" environment and reduce the fall in birth rates. It had four basic objectives: to increase the quality of life of families, to promote intergenerational solidarity, to support the family as a guarantee for social cohesion, and to support families at risk (social exclusion, single parents, families in process of separation and families with "intra-familial" violence). Ten strategies were drawn up, and one of them was labelled as the "reconciliation of family and work life". Within this part, various issues were raised. Attitudes should be changed to favour an equal sharing of family responsibilities between women and men, companies should facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life, and the state should help men and women to enter the labour market without "abandoning their family responsibilities" (López et. al. 2007). The plan was criticized in the parliament by the Socialist Party *PSOE* and the Left Party *IU*, particularly for its lack of specific funding commitments.

Family policy in Spain has been oriented towards fiscal reforms rather than public services. The Conservative government introduced a new tax measure, *Act 46/2002*, by which a tax deduction for maternity was established, giving working mothers the possibility to apply for a subsidy of €100 per month for each child under 3 years of age. This government measure fell within the wider program of action articulated in the *Integral Plan for Family Support (2001-2004)*. The overall purpose of the tax reform of the Act 46/2002 was to strengthen the family as an institution, to counter the decreasing birth rates and the ageing of the population, and to stimulate female employment. The objective of the tax deduction was to compensate mothers on the grounds that motherhood involves a social and labour-related cost for women. The mothers targeted by the reform had to have a full-time job or be self-employed and be registered with the Social Security at least 15 days per month. Also women with part-time jobs working at least 50% registered with the Social Security for the whole month could benefit from the reform. This fiscal measure complemented an already existing measure whereby all taxpayers were granted the possibility to deduct from their income tax up to €1200 per year for each child under three years of age³⁷. When the tax reform was introduced, it was

³⁷ Hence, also married couples with a full-time housewife could benefit through tax deduction on the husband's income tax.

criticised by the trade unions and women's organizations because it ignored women who were not in paid employment. The reform was not supporting those most needy and it was not articulated as a universal citizen right. While the trade union General Workers' Union *UGT* criticized the tax reform because of its exclusionary character, arguing that *all* mothers should have the right to a child subsidy, the People's Ombudsman was sceptical towards the idea of extending the subsidy to all mothers since that could be regarded as a "mothers' salary" with negative effects on women's participation in the labour market.

In the *Fourth Plan for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men (2003-2006)* the reconciliation of work and family life was articulated as one of the core areas. The main idea was that a greater sharing of care and domestic work would facilitate women's participation in the labour market. The plan promoted men's participation in domestic work in principle but very few measures actually targeted men. At the same time, an important measure was to increase work flexibility (implicitly for women) meaning part-time jobs, work from home and concentrated working hours.

Reconciliation policies during the Socialist government of PSOE (2004-)

The reconciling of work and family life continued to be a recurrent issue in political debates during the Socialist government. The Socialist government (2004-) declared gender equality a priority and there have been important legislative changes in issues related to gender equality, social policy and family policy. In 2005 a new Act recognized different family formations by introducing the right to homosexual marriage³⁸. That same year the Act against Gender Violence³⁹ was adopted. In 2010 a legal reform made abortion a free choice within the first 14 weeks of pregnancy. The developments in social policy during the Socialist government have involved the creation of a national policy for elderly care, the adoption of an individual paternity leave, the flexibilization of the working day, and improved rights to care-related unpaid leaves. The reconciliation of work and family life was regarded as a key issue related to gender equality.

Act 3/2007, of 22 March, for effective equality between women and men was adopted in 2007, coinciding with the "European Year of Equal Opportunity for All". According to the Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, the Equality Act aimed at "doing women justice", celebrating the 75th anniversary of women's right to vote in Spain. The Act emphasized gender inequality problems such as gendered violence, the gender pay gap, women's unemployment and the reconciliation of personal, work and family life (López et. al 2007: 9). In order to increase women's employment rates, the Act emphasized women's adaptation to labour market requirements. The Equality Act transposed the European Directives 2002/73/CE on the application of the principle of equality between women and men in the access to employment, training and working

³⁸ *Ley 13/2005, de 1 de julio, por la que se modifica el Código Civil en materia de derecho a contraer matrimonio*. This law has been criticized for being constructed from a false "neutral" perspective, lacking an intersectional approach and marginalizing lesbians, under-age LGTB people, immigrants, elderly, etc. (Platero 2007a, 2007b).

³⁹ *Ley Orgánica 1/2004, de 28 de diciembre, de Medidas de Protección Integral contra la Violencia de Género*.

conditions and Directive 2004/113/CE on the application of the principle of equality between women and men in the access to goods and services (Salido 2009: 298).

While the reconciliation of personal, family and work life was a key issue, the individual right to paternity leave was promoted as the most innovative measure. The new individual paternity leave was two weeks (13 days), with the objective of gradually extending it to four weeks in 2011⁴⁰. However, due to the economic crisis, the extension of the paternity leave has been postponed. Already during the Conservative government the issue of paternity leaves was disputed in the press and in the parliament. At that time, the left-wing parties in the opposition presented parliamentary bills to introduce an individual right to paternity leave but the proposals were not taken into consideration in the parliament where the Conservatives had absolute majority. In the negotiations of the Equality Act it was the Socialist government that put limits to the extension of the paternity leave against the demands of the parties in the opposition, but all agreed upon an extension to four weeks in the near future. The Act also changed the requirements for maternity leaves in terms of national insurance payments, introducing a subsidy to mothers who do not comply with the requirements⁴¹. Moreover, the Act improved the conditions for reduced working days and leaves of absence to care for family members. The right to reduced working hours for child care was changed so that the maximum age of the child was increased from six to eight years and the extension was increased from one to two years while maintaining the same job position. The Equality Act was passed with the support of all the parliamentary groups except for the Conservative Party, whose main objection was related to the quotas for women's political representation (Salido 2009: 300-3).

The Act was preceded by a process of negotiations with different actors. Within the feminist movement, the debates on the Equality Act strongly focused on the issue of reconciliation, although the terms of the debate were re-conceptualized by emphasizing the concept of care (*cuidados*) and the social organization of care. A platform for feminist organizations⁴² emphasized the importance of the right to paternity leave. A *Manifiesto* elaborated by women's organizations for the International Women's Day, the 8th of March 2007, demanded a non-transferable paternity leave of 4 weeks, increased care services, and better measures for reconciliation also for workers in regimes other than the General Regime of the Social Security system, such as an extension of the right to maternity leave for all women workers (Comisión 8 de marzo 2007). The feminist movement regarded the paternity leave as established in the Equality Act as being too limited. Nonetheless, representatives of the feminist movement criticized that they were marginalized in the debate while the most influential actors were the major trade unions.

⁴⁰ Until the adoption of the Equality Act the individual paternity leave was 2 days of leave. The extension was established in Act 9/2009 (*Ley 9/2009, de 6 de octubre, de ampliación de la duración del permiso de paternidad en los casos de nacimiento, adopción o acogida*).

⁴¹ The minimum of national insurance payments is 180 days but for mothers up to 26 years of age the minimum is lower. The subsidy for mothers who do not fulfill the requirements implies a 42 days of maternity leave.

⁴² Organized by Forum de política Feminista, Mujeres por la Paz, Confederación de Mujeres Rurales CERES y CELEM.

The problem of the low birth rates in Spain motivated the introduction of a tax deduction/subsidy of €2500 to mothers with newborn children⁴³. As with the €100 subsidy for childcare, mothers were the target of the subsidy. Fathers could only get the subsidy in the case the mother had passed away. While the government presented the “baby cheque” (*cheque bebé*) as a ground-breaking universal measure, it was disconnected from its gender equality policies. Criticism of the reform came from both left-wing and right-wing voices. While the Conservative Party argued in favour of a higher quantity, left-wing representatives rejected the pro-natal orientation of the reform and argued for a progressive reform that would especially favour less well-off families. In the context of the economic crisis and severe cuts in social spending, it was decided that the *cheque bebé* would be suspended in January 2011.

Some key policy plans should also be mentioned here. With the support of the major trade unions, the Ministry of Public Administration adopted “*Plan Concilia*”⁴⁴ (*Plan Reconcile*) in 2005, which introduced measures to improve the reconciliation of personal and work life of civil servants. The measures assured better conditions for civil servants in issues related to the reconciliation of work and family life, including rules on flexible workdays and the right to a ten-day paternity leave. Thereby, civil servants got extended rights in relation to the reconciliation of work and family life before the adoption of the Equality Act which introduced an individual paternity leave for all working fathers. A policy plan to create a framework to guarantee that regional and local governments increase the supply of public childcare was articulated in the *National Strategic Plan for Children and Adolescents* (2006-09)⁴⁵. Recent proposals to further develop the availability of childcare for children between 0-3 years of age have also been presented by right-wing parties in the opposition. The *Strategic Plan for Equal Opportunities* (2008-2011) introduced the notion of “co-responsibility” as a key strategy, and as an area separated from the area of “participation in the economic sphere”. A *Strategic Plan for Citizenship and Integration* (2007-2010) elaborated in the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and approved by the Government dedicated a specific chapter to “women”. This policy plan highlighted the unequal distribution of family responsibilities in immigrant families, considering that immigrant women are often the exclusive persons in charge of domestic work and of caring for children and other dependents. The reconciliation problem of immigrant women was said to be decisive for immigrant women’s situation of social inclusion or exclusion.

5.2.2 A working mother’s problem

In the following sections I will scrutinize the problem representations surrounding the “reconciliation of work and family life” during the period of the Conservative

⁴³ *Ley 35/2007, de 15 de noviembre, por la que se establece la deducción por nacimiento o adopción en el Impuesto sobre la Renta de las Personas Físicas y la prestación económica de pago único de la Seguridad Social por nacimiento o adopción.*

⁴⁴ “*Plan Concilia*” – *Plan integral para la conciliación de la vida personal y laboral en la Administración*. Ministry of Public Administration, 2005.

⁴⁵ *Plan Estratégico Nacional de Infancia y Adolescencia* (2006-09).

government (1996-2004). I will show how the “working mother” has been framed as the normative subject of reconciliation policies and draw attention to the masculine norms and exclusionary effects on certain groups of women.

During the Conservative governments the policies that aimed to address the problem of reconciliation of work and family life framed the problem in terms of working mothers’ managing of paid and unpaid work (“family responsibilities”). Mothers should be able to develop professional careers and have as many children as they want to; to make family and work responsibilities compatible was emphasized as an important national goal. The framing of the problem indicated that women should be “helped” to reconcile their work and family life. Working mothers were represented as the problem-holders and the ones who most urgently needed to solve the problem.

The *Act 39/1999, of 5 November, to promote workers’ reconciliation of family and work life* enhanced the link between the reconciliation problem and working mothers by focusing on the rights related to maternity leaves. Reconciliation was regarded as a need that emerged from women’s incorporation in the labour market and demographic changes. While women were addressed as the principle persons in charge of child care and right-holders of maternity leave, fathers were attributed the role of substitutes and continued without an individual right to paternity leave. Mothers with formal employment, however, could transfer part of their maternity leave of 16 weeks to fathers. Nevertheless, the right “belonged to the mother”, as was emphasized in the parliamentary debates on the Reconciliation Act. The “neutral” language used in the Act indicated that the point of departure was the idea of the worker as male, referring to its masculine form (*el trabajador*). At the same time, women were constructed as caregivers and “maternity” became the word most often employed for both mothers’ and fathers’ childrearing. With this Act workers got the right to a one-hour leave from work for breastfeeding (*lactancia*) until the child was nine months old. Paradoxically, this “breastfeeding leave” could be used indiscriminately by the mother or the father, on the condition that they had formal employment.

Certainly, the problem of reconciliation of work and family life was represented as a problem linked to childbirth and childrearing. Other care-related issues, such as care for the elderly or disabled people, appeared as secondary. In the parliamentary debates on reconciliation the link between the problem of reconciliation and having children was frequently stressed:

To speak about the reconciliation is definitely to speak about what affects most directly the daily life of people, it is to speak about how to be able to combine the right to work and the right to be able to have children. (MP María Mercè Pigem I Palmès, Catalanian Coalition Party *Convergència i Unió*, Parliamentary Debate 13 May 2003)

The reconciliation of family and work life is based on that the couple has to procreate and that the result should not be a problem. It has been said on the stand that today women have much more liberty to choose not to have children than to have them. That is totally true. (MP Luis Mardones Sevilla, Canary Coalition Party, Parliamentary Debate 13 February 2004)

A common idea within the policy discourse on the problem of reconciliation was that women should not have to choose between being a mother and being a worker. That mothers should be able to develop their professional careers and have as many children as they wanted to was stressed among both left- and right-wing voices. Policies should make it possible for men and women to work without having to renounce being fathers and mothers. Yet, the main focus fell upon women's possibilities of being workers and mothers, and not men's possibilities to be workers and fathers. The underlying norm, thus, was that a woman should be both a "worker" and a "mother". A Socialist MP argued that we need to abolish for good the "exclusive choice of women between being a mother and being a worker" (MP Elvira Cortajarena Iturrioz, Parliamentary Debate, 27 April 1999). In a similar vein, the Conservative Party's electoral program from 2004 argued that enabling working women to have as many children as they want to was an important national goal.

We especially want mothers to develop their professional careers and have as many children as they want to. To make family and work responsibilities compatible is a possible and desirable goal in Spain. (Electoral program of the Conservative Party, *Partido Popular*, from 2004)

Albeit the reconciliation of work and family life was represented as a working mothers' matter, it was also regarded as problematic to see the reconciliation as a women's issue. A recurrent criticism was that the policies only "help women reconcile with themselves". Among critical left-wing voices in the opposition at the time there was a fear that the focus on working mothers in the Reconciliation Act would reproduce women in their role as carers; as mothers, wives, nurses, carers of the elderly, etc. But also the Conservative Party used the argument that reconciliation should not be a women's issue –yet it is. Hence, still today the reconciliation of family and work life focuses much more on women than men. In contrast, the norm group was most often constituted by those who do not need to do care work and domestic work; masculine work patterns were the norm. That to "reconcile" was considered the exception, not the norm, can be illustrated by the following statement:

Worthy of stressing is the increase since 1999 of working persons who combine their work activity with household chores. In that year we started with 3,600,000 persons, while in this moment there are five million who combine the household chores with work. (MP Celinda Sánchez García, Conservative Party, Parliamentary Debate 27 July 2003)

The normative subject of the working mother operated as an exclusionary norm. Overall, women were constructed as a homogeneous group supposedly sharing the same problems of caretaking/work responsibilities, and, yet, the measures favoured certain groups of women. The tax reform of the Act 46/2002 gave working mothers the right to apply for a subsidy of €100 per month for each child under three years of age. The objective was to compensate "working mothers":

With the aim of compensating for social and labour-related costs derived from maternity, a new tax deduction is added, directed to mothers of children under three years of age who work outside home. (Act 46/2002)

This tax reform produced a normative assumption of women, and not men, as carers. At the same time, the reform addressed only mothers with formal employment, excluding various groups of women from benefits: unemployed women, workers in the submerged economy (often migrant and working-class women) and housewives. In that sense, the measure tended to favour middle- and upper-class women. The privileging of certain groups of women along divisions of class and nationality says something about the normative subject of reconciliation policies: who is constructed as worthy of support and who is not. Women should be mothers but also workers and the benefit reinforced the norm of women's participation in the labour market (which will be further explored below). Some critical left-wing MPs argued that the tax deduction for working mothers was unjust and discriminatory because it meant constructing women, and not men, as the main persons in charge of family care. Additionally, the norm of working mothers was questioned, emphasizing the high unemployment among mothers of small children. The argument was then oriented towards equality for the unemployed, a traditional left-wing concern.

The low birth rates in Spain were sometimes linked to the problem of reconciliation of work and family life. But in contrast to the European Union, Spanish policy debates have not articulated a strong “demographic time bomb” discourse (Duncan 2002), which depicts a demographic crisis in the context of ageing populations and low birth rates. This is probably linked to the negative associations of pro-natal policies with the Franco dictatorship. The *Integral Plan for Family Support* represented the problem of low birth rates as a very serious problem but, at the same time, it emphasized that the purpose was not to make policies that are merely “pro-natal”. Rather, it argued in favour of families’ “freedom of choice” and enhanced the importance of supporting the stability of families, offering families sufficient support so that they can have as many children as they wish. At the same time, “large families” (*familias numerosas*) were constructed as worthy of special support, regardless of their economic situation. The family policy plan emphasized that Spanish society is demographically and economically enriched from the efforts of fathers and mothers of large families. In the parliamentary debates there was a general agreement that low birth rates constituted an important policy problem. Women’s family responsibilities were seen an obstacle for entering the labour market and this problem explained the low birth rates.

5.2.3 Reconciliation as the key to gender equality

The working mother was put forward as the legitimate subject of reconciliation policies and, in extension, of gender equality. Here I will explore further the ways in which the reconciliation of work and family life was represented as a policy problem closely interrelated with gender (in)equality during the Conservative government. Facilitating the reconciliation was represented as the key to gender equality. Within this policy discourse,

women's labour market participation was a dominant underlying norm. Women should be mothers, but also workers.

There was a consensus among all the political parties with regards to recognizing the reconciliation as a major gender inequality problem in the Spanish society. The Conservative Party framed the reconciliation of work and family life as a priority issue and argued that the government was making historical progress in the matter, by proposing a series of legal changes and measures that put women and men "at the same level" in work and family life. They argued that the Reconciliation Act and the tax deduction for working mothers constituted an advance not only in terms of family support, but also in terms of "women's equality" and "equal opportunities". Definitively, the message was that women's emancipation should be achieved through the reconciliation of work and family life.

A central and dominant norm in the debate on reconciliation was women's labour market participation. Women's labour market participation was the key to equality. The Reconciliation Act 39/1999 was generally conceived as promoting gender equality, and one of the main objectives of this Act was women's incorporation in the labour market. Importantly, new policies on reconciliation should not obstruct women's labour market participation and professional careers.

The Act introduces changes in the work sphere so that workers can participate in family life, taking a new step in the way towards equal opportunities between women and men. It also tries to maintain a balance to favour maternity and paternity leaves without letting this affect negatively the possibilities to access employment, working conditions and women's access to jobs with special responsibilities. (Act 39/1999)

Women's employment was, without a doubt, widely recognized as one of the major challenges that public policies had to deal with. Women's participation in the labour market was seen as a requisite for women's equality and the massive incorporation of women in the labour market was considered a great advance for the country. Women's paid work was considered good for society because it increased "women's equality", but also because it generated economic growth, in Spain as well as all over Europe:

The situation of women in the labour market has been characterized by some progress in the last years. The increase of women's participation in the labour market has been the generator of increase in employment in Europe, considered both as subsistence and contribution to GDP. (Third Plan for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men 1997–2000)

The Conservative Party argued that there was a need to create more employment opportunities for women; equal opportunity between women and men required, first of all, the creation of "more and better employment for women" (The Conservative Party's electoral program for 2004). The statement highlights that women's equality was seen as conditioned by the creation of more female employment which implicitly involved an understanding of women's employment as different from men's employment. Society needs to create more employment that fit women, associated with the suggestion to create more "flexible" work opportunities. Both the *Third* and the *Fourth Plan for Equal*

Opportunities promoted a flexibilization of the labour market in order to facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life. Only the fourth plan mentioned that this should not be at the expense of workers' rights.

Reconciliation as emancipation builds on the idea of employment as a success story. The framing of paid work in terms of success and emancipation lacks a class perspective and ignores the conditions in which many women enter the labour market as well as the many women who always have carried out paid work, often in the submerged economy. As Carol Bacchi argues, the equation of women's equality with labour market participation "ignores the fact that many women have been participants in the workforce for some time and this has not produced their liberation" (1999: 131). Furthermore, a perspective that equates workforce participation with success and self-fulfilment implies a denigration of homemaking and childrearing as fulfilling tasks.

Whereas the incorporation of women in the labour market was a central norm, women's economic autonomy has been a marginal issue⁴⁶. Hence, women's economic autonomy as a reason why women should participate in the labour market was a marginalized issue while macro-level economic motives dominated. What is more, the policies of unpaid leaves to care for family members (*excedencias*) were generally accepted as a way of solving women's reconciliation problems. However, most often unpaid leaves make women economically dependent on their partner or husband, but this was ignored in the debates. The tendency to emphasize women's employment without aiming at women's independence has been identified as a pattern in various welfare states. As Bacchi points out, the policies aim to make family life feasible for women, not to undermine it (1999: 136). Without a doubt, the norm promoted in the policy discourse was a dual earner model, assuming the two incomes, and not an "adult worker" model.

Within the logic of women's labour market participation as the key to gender equality, care and domestic work were often represented as "non-work", even if there were some references to the need for revaluing this work. According to the *Integral Plan for Family Support*, the work of caring for children, the elderly and disabled has traditionally fallen upon women, and the progressive incorporation of women in the labour market thus requires an increase in support facilitating the reconciliation of family and work life. The reconciliation of work and family life was articulated as a need that emerged from the social changes, particularly women's incorporation in the labour market and demographic changes. Hence, the problem was constructed as a "new" problem⁴⁷. The discourse transmitted the idea that women did not work "before", that is,

⁴⁶ Left-wing voices did raise the issue of precariousness in work which contrasted the dominant view of women's employment as a success story. They warned of the flipside of "flexible" female work: "...precarious work has still a woman's face... It is true that more women work, that women's activity rate has increased two points, but the employment that women have is absolutely precarious. Be careful with those contracts that *a priori* may be very comfortable because we women can reconcile with ourselves, as we do not continue to insist on that what we have to do is to make possible for men and women to share and distribute our responsibilities". (MP Michaela Navarro Garzón, Socialist Party Parliamentary Debate, 13 May 2003)

⁴⁷ Some criticism articulated by left-wing MPs against the representation of reconciliation as a new problem. "You know perfectly well that the need to reconcile family and work life is an ancient and historically recognized need, but it so happens that the dominant ideology has not been interested in solving this". (MP María Jesús Aramburu del Río, Left Party, Parliamentary Debate 27 July 1999)

before they entered the labour market. Statements like the following were recurrent among all the political parties:

There are evident difficulties... involved when women enter the *work world*. (MP María Jesús Aramburu del Río, Left Party, Parliamentary Debate 27 July 1999)

This representation can be said to ignore the work women have done throughout history, in formal and informal labour markets. The idea that women had just entered the “work world” conceals the work women have done in the home. As such, care and domestic work were constructed as non-work. The *Third National Plan for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men* promoted an investigation of the possibilities to calculate women’s domestic work as part of the GDP. Even so, the emphasis on the fact that women need to be incorporated in the labour market and the benefits granted particularly to mothers working outside the household indicate a hierarchical definition of work where paid work is deemed more important than care work and domestic work. In the parliamentary debates very few MPs articulated care work in the family as important and valuable work in itself. What is more, “care” was often marginal in the discourse that rather highlighted “family responsibilities” and “domestic work”.

The unequal sharing of domestic responsibilities between men and women was also represented as a problem. In spite of the progressive incorporation of women in the labour market, women still have the primary responsibility for care of domestic work and family responsibilities. The *Third Plan for Equal Opportunities* promoted a “harmonization of work and family responsibilities” between women and men, by distributing equally between the two sexes the times of production, reproduction and personal time. The *Fourth Plan for Equal Opportunities* emphasized that the incorporation of women in the labour market had made necessary a shift towards a system that would take into account the new social relations and the new kind of cooperation between women and men and that would make possible a well-balanced division of responsibilities in professional and family life. The stereotypes that construct women as caregivers and men as breadwinners were represented as a problem. In a similar vein, the Reconciliation Act stated that women’s labour market participation provoked a need for a new kind of commitment between men and women, “that would allow for a balanced division of responsibilities in professional and private life” (Act 39/1999).

At the same time, in the key policy documents on gender equality, the *Third* and *Fourth Plan for Equal Opportunities*, there were very few measures that directly targeted men. Generally, the lack of sharing family responsibilities and domestic tasks between women and men was primarily considered an obstacle for women’s entrance in the labour market. In other words, gender inequality in the home led to gender inequality in the labour market. Family responsibilities, and specifically motherhood, were considered obstacles for the integration and permanence of women in the labour market. In the policy discourse motherhood was at once celebrated and emphasized as an obstacle for women’s careers. The male breadwinner model was criticized, but there was a tendency to see both men and women as “victims” of their education which had shaped them in line with the gendered roles.

In this society in which we [men and women] all live we are the result and victims at the same time of the education we have received, an education which historically has separated men and women to do totally different tasks. Men were made responsible for bringing a salary home to maintain the family; women were traditionally entrusted to do reproductive tasks and care for the family. (MP Michaela Navarro Garzón, Socialist Party, Parliamentary Debate 13 May 2003)

That women try to “find solutions for everything” was considered as permitting the “old” strong male breadwinner model to continue while putting women in a disadvantaged situation in the labour market. These representations ignored power relations, constructing men equally as “victims” of gender roles, on the one hand, and blaming women for “solving the problems” and, thereby, reproducing gender divisions in care and domestic work, on the other. Conservative voices articulated the goal in terms of a more “well-balanced” division of work, not an equal division. In order for this to happen, men and women had to become aware of the fundamental role of fathers in the family. When debating an individual non-transferable paternity leave it was argued that a legal reform was not as important as a change in individual attitudes and practices.

The project builds the ground to promote what we might call a new commitment between men and women to a well-balanced distribution – I emphasize the word balanced because that is the key – of responsibilities between family and work. It is certain that it is not only necessary to make the father aware, but the whole society as well and, maybe, the mother, of how fundamental the role of the father is in the care for children from the first moment and this requires a change in mentalities. (MP María Jesús Sainz García, Conservative Party, Parliamentary Debate 27 July 1999)

From this perspective, the changes depended on a “change in mentality” of women and men and not a legal change granting fathers the right to an individual paternity leave. By focusing on individual fathers and mothers, the absence of an individual, non-transferable paternity leave was legitimated.

5.2.4 A modernity project

In spite of the emphasis on the norm of sharing care and domestic work, gendered power relations were generally ignored in the discourse⁴⁸. The “egalitarian family” appeared as an ideal, but it was marginal in comparison to the norm of women’s labour market participation. The *Integral Plan for Family Support* claimed that the ideal family was the (heterosexual) family where “the man” and “the woman” shared responsibilities of “work” and “domestic work”:

The ideal of the egalitarian family, that is, where both [women and men] work and share domestic work, dominates; however, in the reality of daily life of Spanish families there is most often an unequal distribution of chores and responsibilities

⁴⁸ The closest to dealing with power were the left-wing voices that highlighted that the family had to become “democratic”.

between the man and the woman. This inequality in the distribution of housework, which is not shared to the degree in which it should be in an advanced society and which is demanded in order to achieve an equal position for women, is an obstacle for women's incorporation in employment and for professional advancement but also for men's experience of paternity. (Integral Plan for Family Support 2001-2004)

The issue of gender equality was discussed in terms of a modernity project. Gender equality, reconciliation and women's employment were represented as signs of national progress. The political project of promoting reconciliation of work and family life through public policy was articulated as an indication of a developed state. More specifically, sharing tasks between women and men was considered a sign of the "advanced" or modern society, and a requirement for women's employment and professional career. The modern society was associated with the dual earner model. In the parliamentary debates the idea of sharing between women and men as a modern way of life was recurring. The references to the European Union and the European Union Directives also legitimated that the "reconciliation project" was a modern one. The traditional sexual division of work was represented as outdated.

The patriarchal model prevailing until very recently... is not modern, I think no one demands it. (MP Elvira Cortajarena Iturrioz, Socialist Party, Parliamentary Debate 27 April 1999)

The framing of reconciliation as the key to gender equality can be understood in the light of Robina Mohammad's (2004) accounts of Spanish state feminism. Her work sheds light on the idea of gender equality as a modernity project which privileges certain categories of women and marginalizes others. "Equality" feminism and the norm of inclusion of women in the labour market have been dominant, but this way of framing gender equality tends to valorize some women while marginalizing others. The discourse has privileged inequalities produced by gender and the man/women binary and the "home" has been conceived as oppressive while the public sphere and paid work have been viewed as the key to emancipation. "Modern", middle-class and young women have been seen as the key to national progress, as opposed to "traditional", working class and old women. There has been little challenge to the idea of universal sisterhood in which all women share a common experience of patriarchal oppression and a common goal of modernity and equality. As Mohammad argues, a discourse that almost exclusively addresses women's inequality by focusing on their exclusion from the formal labour market marginalizes women's engagement in paid informal work and ignores work precariousness of the capitalist labour market.

5.2.5 Co-responsibility

The issue of reconciliation of work and family life continued to be a salient issue during the Socialist government from 2004 onwards. Many of the elements that were represented as central in the framing of reconciliation of work and family life during the Conservative government would also be important during the Socialist government, but

here I focus more on the shifts in the discourse. The aspect of “personal” life was added to the concept. “Working mothers” were still constructed as a central category in the policy discourse, but the lack of “co-responsibility” between women and men was named a policy problem on the agenda and there was a stronger emphasis on fathers’ role in childcare.

The *Act for effective equality between women and men* from 2007 referred to the “right to reconciliation of personal, family and work life”. During the Socialist government this concept has been frequently used. This shift can be seen as an attempt to go beyond the idea of family responsibility and to emphasize individual rights and needs. This shift can also be related to the recognition of the diversity of family forms. As a Left Party representative argued in a parliamentary debate: “to simply speak about the family, the way *Partido Popular* does, is an anachronism” (MP María Carme García Suárez, Left Party, Parliamentary Debate 29 June 2004).

The Equality Act promoted “greater co-responsibility between women and men in assuming family obligations”. Sharing care and domestic work between women and men was an important facet of this co-responsibility and women’s double workday was part of the problem representation. Co-responsibility was an important norm in order to achieve women’s increased participation in paid employment, and within this logic co-responsibility was represented as a crucial element in achieving gender equality. The family was generally represented in concordance with the dual breadwinner model where women and men work outside home. Family responsibilities should be shared between women and men, because the contrary would mean to condemn women to endless workdays.

The right to paternity leave was framed as an essential measure in order to achieve co-responsibility. At the time of the debates on the Equality Act, the debates surrounding an individual, non-transferable paternity leave had already been going on for years without resulting in a new right. The Equality Act represented the introduction of an individual right to paternity leave as the most innovative measure:

The most innovative measure to favour the reconciliation of personal, family and work life is the paternity leave of thirteen days... To contribute to a more equal distribution of family responsibilities [the Act] concedes to fathers the right to a leave and benefit for paternity. (Act 3/2007)

Although recognizing the role of fathers in care, the right to two weeks of paternity leave can be seen as representing a symbolic rather than substantial change. When debating the Equality Act, various parties argued in favour of a four-week paternity leave instead of two, including the Conservative Party. The Conservative Party did not vote in favour of the Act due to the policy on parity in the electoral lists, but the party generally supported the measures related to reconciliation and co-responsibility. The Socialist Party in the government accepted to extend the leave to four weeks in the near future, but the extension would be postponed due to the crisis. When adopted in 2007, the new right to paternity leave was celebrated as representing one of the “most advanced” rights in the world⁴⁹.

⁴⁹ This statement did not take into account the difference between paternity leave, an individual right, and parental leave, which fathers and mothers can distribute the parental leave as they wish, see chapter 6.

This extension, honoured members, of the right of the father to care for his children will situate us among the most advanced countries in the world. I wish to recall that in Germany and Holland the paternity leave is two days, in France and United Kingdom, two weeks – 15 days; only Finland in the world will beat us, with a paternity leave of 18 days. (Minister of Labour and Social Affairs Jesús Caldera Sanchez-Capitán, Socialist Party, Parliamentary Debate 21 December 2006)

The introduction of a paternity leave was frequently represented in terms of creating “equal rights” for women and men, mothers and fathers:

Our proposals emphasize especially the co-responsibility, granting the same rights to fathers as to mothers... especially in creating an independent and non-transferable paternity leave which is serious and extensive. (MP Susana Camarero Benítez, Conservative Party, Parliamentary Debate 21 December 2006)

Paradoxically, practically no proposal regarding paternity leaves involved the possibility of an actual equal sharing⁵⁰ and with the Equality Act fathers got a two-week leave while mothers had a four-month leave. Only a parliamentary bill from 2004 by the small left-wing party *BNG*, the Galician Nationalist Party, actually proposed a paternity leave of equal length as the maternity leave with the aim of overcoming essentialist and deterministic notions of gender.

The discourse on co-responsibility between women and men took for granted the heterosexual family. Although the diversity of family forms was mentioned at times, the idea of sharing tasks between women and men reinforced heteronormativity, marginalizing homosexual families. Indeed, Spanish gender equality policies, as articulated in both national and regional laws and Plans for Equal Opportunity, have often tended to marginalize the experience and voices of lesbians⁵¹ (Platero 2007a and 2007b, 2008). The discourse on co-responsibility also marginalized other categories such as single mothers given that it assumed the two-income family as the norm.

An important argument in favour of the individual paternity leave was that only when men take responsibility in child care will women not be discriminated in the labour market. Co-responsibility was an important norm in order to achieve women’s increased participation in paid employment. Reconciliation and co-responsibility were primarily framed within a discourse on employment and the labour market.

The Act pays special attention to the correction of inequalities in the specific sphere of labour relations. Through a series of provisions, the right to reconciliation of personal, family and labour life and a greater co-responsibility between women and men in assuming family obligations is recognized. (Act 3/2007)

The issue of reconciliation was introduced within the broader objective referred to as “the right to work in equal opportunities”. Women’s improved “employability” was

⁵⁰ The Socialist party in government rejected this proposal by referring to economic reasons.

⁵¹ As Raquel Platero has argued, the policy on homosexual marriage can also be criticized for being gender-blind.

emphasized; thus, the goal was to increase women's adaptation to labour market requirements.

Employment policies will have as a priority the objective to increase women's participation in the labour market and to advance in the effective equality between women and men. Therefore, women's employability and permanence in employment will be enhanced, promoting their level of training and adaptation to the requirements of the labour market. (Act 3/2007 for effective equality between women and men)

The reverse adaptation, private companies and employers' overall adaptation to the requirements of care or "personal life" was not expressed as an aim, although employers would have to comply with the established rights related to reconciliation. Increased productivity also appeared in relation to the issue of reconciliation of work and family life. In a parliamentary debate on the Equality Act it was emphasized that experts had shown that improving reconciliation policies, for instance, achieving flexible schedules, a new organization of time at work and an increase in maternity leaves favoured the motivation among workers and, thereby, increased productivity. Consequently, while women's labour market participation was highlighted as a central norm, the reasons why this was so important referred to economic growth and stability, employment rates and productivity. As during the Conservative government, women's economic autonomy was a much more marginal argument for why women's labour market participation was vital. Yet, it did appear among some left-wing voices.

We have thought it convenient to emphasize all that refers to work, because we believe that women's economic independence is also what gives them autonomy towards other persons, especially men and, therefore, it is the antidote to situations of abuse, emotional dependency, etcetera, which takes away the dignity and liberty of women. (MP Georgina Oliva I Peña, *Esquerra Republicana*, Left-wing Catalanian Party, Parliamentary Debate 21 December 2006)

In the *Strategic plan for Equal Opportunities (2007-2010)* the notion of co-responsibility was different from that of the Equality Act. According to this plan, the central problem was that women performed the lion's share of care and domestic work, which perpetuated the sexual division of labour and delimited women's participation and opportunities in the labour market. The plan also considered as problematic the little value attributed to care and domestic work as well as the sex-segregated labour market, with one out of seven women working in the sector of cleaning or similar. The limited implication of the state in care was acknowledged as an important problem. As a solution, the plan put forward the idea of "social co-responsibility", including not only the sharing of responsibilities between women and men, but also including public responsibility. Co-responsibility then meant going beyond the focus on individuals, "especially men", to include social agents and private entities as well as public institutions. Such a strategy set out to go beyond the focus on reconciliation as a "women's problem" that would be solved by individual mothers and fathers.

5.2.6 Women, mothers, superwomen

There were also representations contradictory to the new focus on fathers' care during the Socialist government. Such representations emphasized the mother's crucial role in child care, reinforcing essentialist representations of motherhood. The norm of women's participation in the labour market was not questioned, but the importance of mothering legitimized the targeting of mothers and not fathers. This happened when the issue in focus was related to birth rates. The low birth rates continued to be a concern also during the Socialist government, among all the political parties. In the parliamentary debates many MPs highlighted the fact that Spain had among the lowest birth rates in the world and that many women would like to have more children but cannot due to the economic constraints and limited reconciliation policies. When the problem of reconciliation was linked to birth rates, "working mothers" were again in focus. While employment was represented as self-fulfilment, motherhood also appeared as essential in order for women to develop fully as individuals. In this discourse the "working mother" was reinforced as the normative subject position and, thus, other categories and identities were marginalized.

As a measure to facilitate the reconciliation and increase the extremely low birth rates, the government elaborated Act 35/2007 that introduced a €2500 subsidy/tax deduction in relation to childbirth and adoption. The Act established the mother, and not the father, as entitled to the new right. The Minister of Labour and Social Affairs put forward an essentialist notion of women, emphasizing the link between women, mothering and care as a natural condition; the attribution of the benefit to the mother was motivated by the "special link of motherhood with the birth and adoption of a new child" (Speech by Jesús Caldera, Minister of Labour and Social Affairs in the Parliamentary Commission of Labour and Social Affairs, 24 July 2007). The new policy enhanced the importance of "family protection" considering the family as an essential element in society. It was claimed that through the protection of the family the problem of low birth rates would be solved. The measure aimed to facilitate the reconciliation of personal, family and work life and to compensate for costs of families. The Act stated that the new benefit was compatible with the tax deduction for maternity regulated by the income tax (Act 46/2002), and that they corresponded to different purposes. While the tax deduction for maternity sought to foment women's participation in the labour market, the new reform aimed to compensate for the costs related to the incorporation of a new child in the family and, thereby, it promoted higher birth rates. In contrast to the previous tax deduction for maternity, the new Act did not only privilege mothers with formal employment. Thus, the measure was two-fold: a tax-deduction for those who had formal employment and were registered with the national insurance and a subsidy for those who had not contributed enough to the national insurance at the time of giving birth or adopting a child.

During both the Conservative and the Socialist government the discourse reinforced the expectation on women as "superwomen". In spite of the problems, women were expected to manage the almost impossible combination of a professional career and care for the family. This statement by the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs reinforces the idea that women are responsible for having and educating children, as well as for contributing to the economic development through professional careers.

The survey of fertility from 1999 concluded that half of the Spanish women in fertile age, between 15 and 49, declared that they would like more children or even their first one if they could. A manifestation that sketches in a sharp manner the lack of correspondence between desires and the reality that Spanish women encounter, their right to be mothers, to care for their children with sufficient time and conditions, to care, of course, for their children in cooperation with their partners, to give them the best education from birth, to do all that without having to renounce professional development and, consequently, their economic and social contribution to our country. (Speech Jesús Caldera, Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Parliament Commission of Labour and Social Affairs, 24 July 2007)

Working mothers were the agents of change and modernization of Spanish society. Within this framework, the “working mother” appeared as responsible for the well-being of the nation (Bowman and Cole 2010; Yuval-Davis 1997). Constructions of gender and gender equality are important parts of the construction of the nation and women are used as “symbolic tools” in the construction of the national project (Magnusson, Rönnblom and Silius 2008). In the Spanish policy discourse on reconciliation the “modern” working mother became the symbol of national progress. As such, fathers’ care work was a secondary issue.

5.2.7 Migrant women and reconciliation

On the margins of the reconciliation debate, “immigrant women” emerged as a category attributed great problems of reconciling work and care. While the policy debate on reconciliation produced a homogeneous category of women, implicitly referring to white Spanish women, the *Strategic Plan for Citizenship and Integration (2007-2010)*, elaborated by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and approved by the Socialist Government, focused on the problem of unequal distribution of care and domestic work in immigrant families. Immigrant women’s exclusive responsibility in domestic work and care for children and other dependents was conceived as a problem because it restrained their possibilities of integration in Spanish society:

If one studies roles and activities in the private sphere, one will observe situations of inequality in the distribution of responsibilities and tasks in the family, which can turn into determinant factors of exclusion in the processes of social integration of immigrant women; the unequal distribution of family incomes, the role division in processes of decision making, the unequal distribution of responsibilities and tasks of unpaid work in the home, as well as in leisure time, among other things, restrain the opportunities of these women to achieve a process of integration in equal conditions as male immigrants. In sum, if we join together the precariousness of their working conditions, the fact that they continue to carry out alone in their own homes the care work that corresponds to the reproductive sphere, that is, being the only persons in charge of care and education of their sons and daughters and other dependent persons that stay in the home, as well as performing all the tasks related to the domestic sphere, and the inexistence of adequate mechanisms that facilitate the

reconciliation of personal, labour and family life, we will find the field apt to produce a great part of the difficulties that negatively and directly affect an optimal development of their migratory project and their social integration. (Strategic Plan for Citizenship and Integration 2007-2010)

While the plan constructed the reconciliation as a problem of integration, it produced a homogenous category of “immigrant women”. The plan did not refer to an actual study of immigrant women and their problems of reconciliation but was based on general assumptions about immigrant women and men. The plan stated that immigrant women alone do all the care and domestic work by themselves implicitly considering their partners (immigrant men?) as responsible for their lack of integration. Other aspects, hardly ever raised in relation to “modern” Spanish women, were added to the problem: the inequality in decision making and income distribution. The problem of unequal distribution of care and domestic work was hence represented in a way that went beyond dominant representations of reconciliation and the lack of co-responsibility in the general policy debate, producing an image of migrant families as a site of greater gender inequalities than Spanish families. In contrast, the way gender inequality interacts with, for instance, racism and class inequalities was downplayed.

These representations were founded on general assumptions of immigrant women’s problems and produced an image of the “Third-World woman” as the oppressed “other” (Mohanty 1997). The plan marginalized the implications of differences among “immigrant women”. It kept silent on the role of migrant women in facilitating the reconciliation of work and family life of Spanish women and men, while their own families often remain in their home countries. In the context of the global care chains, many migrant women have to care for their children or the elderly from a distance. Obviously, some “migrant women” are “working mothers” too, but dominating policy discourses on the reconciliation of work and family life do not recognize them as subjects of gender equality policies and their problems are not taken into account.

5.2.8 Shifting boundaries of family and state responsibility

I will here centre upon the articulation of boundaries between public and private, between “state responsibility” and “family responsibility”, during both the Conservative governments and the Socialist governments. When speaking about state or family responsibility, I am not referring to an intervention/non-intervention dichotomy. Such a dichotomy contributes to a narrative that mystifies the ways in which the state is intervening all the time in the shaping of our lives, when it legislates and when it fails to legislate, when it provides public services and when it emphasizes family care (Bacchi 1999: 134). Rather, I focus on the way in which problems have been constructed as private or public problems and on how state (non-)action has been legitimized.

During the Conservative government the family was emphasized as a fundamental institution in society. Actually, most often the family was not represented as ideally egalitarian, but as a fundamental norm and institution, implicitly associated with traditional gender roles and the views of the Catholic Church. The *Integral Plan for*

Family Support stated that families' needs should be taken into account and that we should "value their role in our society". The plan acknowledged that the ideal balance between family and work life can be very different depending on individual life priorities and values. The norm was then that families should have "freedom of choice" in order to organize work and family life and to achieve "quality of life". "Family responsibility" was articulated as an important element within the issue of reconciliation of work and family life. Within this vein, "intergenerational solidarity" was emphasized, reinforcing the responsibility of the extensive family, associated with the care work performed by grandmothers for their grandchildren or daughters caring for their elderly parents.

Families' freedom of choice in organizing the balance between work and care was a central norm contradictory to the discourse on "working mothers" and the "egalitarian family", because it emphasized that families should be free to decide on how to organize the balance between work and care and thus decide on the (extent of) participation or absence of women/mothers in the labour market and the involvement of men in care and domestic work. The emphasis on freedom of choice can also be interpreted as promoting families' choice in terms of market-oriented solutions to the reconciliation problem. The claim that the family was the key to solve social problems enhanced individual and family responsibility over state responsibility. In other words, care and domestic work were articulated as primarily a private matter. At the same time, these issues were a public concern in the sense that state intervention was necessary in order to help families to carry out their role as caregivers and to guarantee their freedom of choice. The family was framed as a harmonious unit where good values were promoted, such as stability, autonomy and mutual understanding. Moreover, the family was considered the guarantee of social cohesion. The future well-being of the nation was articulated as in the hands of the family:

The social changes of the incorporation of women into the labour market, the declining birth rates and the ageing of our population are a reality, and the success of the future of this new society depends on that families can freely carry out the role that corresponds to them. (Integral Plan for Family Support 2001-2004)

Indeed, the family was most often constructed as representing "good values" and the dominating representation was that of the heterosexual nuclear family. The norm of freedom of choice within the family draws upon the assumption of the family as a harmonious unit and ignores power relations within it (Bacchi 1999: 14). The de-gendering of the family obscures the subjects who constitute the family and who carry out the work within it. Conservative MPs emphasized the family's central role in caring for children, the elderly and disabled and so the caretaking family sometimes displaced the attention from the female caretaker.

For *Partido Popular* the family is the fundamental institution of our society and we do not get tired of repeating this, it constitutes a basic support to guarantee the protection of the weakest, developing, generation after generation, a first-scale social function of caring for children, taking care of the elderly and caring for the disabled and sick. (MP Anna María Madrazo Díaz, Conservative Party, Parliamentary Debate 28 September 2004)

There was a general agreement across the political parties that the Spanish welfare state was “lagging behind”, with a low social spending in comparison to other European Union member states, and that it was necessary to improve the support to families. However, the views of what the relation between the state and the family should be like were diverse. When it came to where the emphasis should lie, on family responsibility or state responsibility, there was a clear right-wing / left-wing divide.

In the parliamentary debates, left-wing voices highlighted the relation between an absent welfare state and an exploitation of women’s work; the women-unfriendly welfare state. Through women’s care for the elderly, children and disabled, women were said to save resources for the state which, in turn, relied on the family until exhaustion (and then turned to the NGOs). The “under-development” of Spanish social policy in support of the family was highlighted. Criticism addressed the policy of privatized services instead of public provision, and tax deductions instead of universal subsidies. The creation of home-help services and public elderly care was represented as necessary, but above all public child care was represented as constituting “women-friendly” policies.

It is necessary to continue to invest in and develop the welfare state. It is necessary that, when a woman wishes to work, she can count on a day care centre where she can leave her child. (MP Michaela Navarro Garzón, Socialist Party, Parliamentary Debate the 13 May 2003)

This Socialist MP adopted a critical perspective on the discourse of reconciliation as a “women’s issue” and, yet, she also reinforced the representation of child care as letting women work. Given that dominating discourses define women as caregivers, it was logical to fall back on an understanding of social policies as “helping women” who “choose to work”. Policies that promote state responsibility do not automatically imply questioning or overthrowing the normative gendered assumptions. The fact that public services can ease women’s double workday does not necessarily mean that women’s roles as principle caregivers are modified. The objective is to make family life feasible for working mothers, not to displace the gendered world itself.

During the Socialist government, and particularly with respect to the Equality Act, the responsibility of the state in the reconciliation of work and family life was extended. At the same time, care and domestic work continued to be represented in terms of “family obligations”, in tension with the new focus on “state responsibility”. “Family obligations” was indeed a common concept to refer to care and domestic work among all the political parties. The notion of “co-responsibility” became central for gender equality policies but acquired different meanings. While in the Equality Act co-responsibility referred to the sharing of care and domestic work between individual women and men in the home, in the *Strategic Plan for Equal Opportunities* (2007-2010) co-responsibility involved a wider social co-responsibility including state responsibility in care and corporate responsibility. In the current context of the economic crisis, the shift from state responsibility towards legitimating individual solutions and family care seems inevitable considering the pressures from the European Union and the International Monetary Fund on Spain to cut social spending (Navarro 2010). Again, we see that the boundaries of the welfare state are continuously (re)negotiated.

5.2.9 Legitimate voices

Certain actors and institutions have been recognized within the policy discourse as legitimate voices in defining the problem. The European Union and the Commission were often highlighted as authorities in the matter of reconciliation of work and family life. Data from the European Union were used to legitimate policy measures. Recommendations and warnings emitted by the European Union were used to strengthen the argumentation. The Reconciliation Act stated that the need to formulate policies to facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life had previously been considered necessary at the European Union level given that it was a problem unmistakably linked to a “new social reality”.

In many occasions the Nordic countries appeared as references since they were recognized as authorities in welfare. For instance, a Socialist MP argued that in the Nordic countries, with a long history of policies in favour of reconciliation and sharing, the time men and women spent on different tasks had tended to equalize (MP Elvira Cortajarena Iturrioz, Socialist Party, Parliamentary Debate 27 April 1999). Sweden was mentioned at occasions as an ideal with respect to public nursery schools and parental leaves. A Conservative MP referred to Sweden as a good example because it had been demonstrated that the number of nursery schools was the main factor that determined the incorporation of women into the labour market (MP María Rosa Estarás Ferragut, Conservative Party, Parliamentary Debate 13 February 2001).

References to women’s organizations and the feminist movement as legitimate voices in defining the problem were used mainly among left-wing representatives. A Left Party MP criticized that in the elaboration of the *Third Plan for Equal Opportunities* the government did not consult any women’s organizations and she claimed that “you need to learn about feminism from us feminists”! (MP María Luisa Castro Fonseca, Left Party, Parliamentary Debate, 13 February 2001). Left-wing female MPs also spoke more often on behalf of women, saying “we women”, as in this statement: “We women, I say we because I am a woman also when I sit down at these desks, are sick of you spending time [*la vida*] talking about us, but you never ever solve any of our problems” (MP Maria Luisa Castro Fonseca, Left Party, Parliamentary Debate, 13 February 2001). Female Conservative MPs could also speak “as women” but they did so emphasizing their role as working mothers, not referring to feminist commitments. In the debate on the Equality Act the left-wing parties emphasized the long struggle of the feminist movement in demanding gender equality.

Voice analysis here also relates to how the policy debate on the reconciliation of work and family life produced a homogeneous category of women, explicitly or implicitly assuming white, autochthonous, heterosexual working mothers as the norm and, hence, making this category the privileged subject position from which it would be legitimate to speak. This critical analysis is not to say that working mothers do not need the support of care-related policies that facilitate women to have a paid employment, but to show that class, race/ethnicity and sexuality were rendered irrelevant whereas all “working mothers” were considered to share the same dilemma in combining work and care.

5.2.10 Summary

The Conservative government of *Partido Popular* (1996–2004) made reconciliation of work and family life a key issue on the political agenda and the issue was related to the problem of gender inequality in a context where these policies were strongly promoted by the EU. The policies that aimed to address the problem of reconciliation of work and family life framed the problem in terms of working mothers' managing of paid and unpaid work. The working mother was put forward as the legitimate subject of reconciliation policies and in extension of gender equality. The Conservative party emphasized that mothers should be able to develop their professional careers and have as many children as they want. To make family and work responsibilities compatible was considered an important national goal.

Act 39/1999 to promote workers' reconciliation of family and work life enhanced the link between the "reconciliation problem" and working mothers by focusing on rights related to maternity leaves. Fathers were attributed the role of substitutes without an individual right to paternity leave. At the same time, while women should be mothers they should also be workers. A central norm in the debate was women's labour market participation; it was a requisite for women's equality and was considered good for society because it generates economic growth. In this context the lack of sharing of care and domestic work between women and men was rather a marginal problem. In *the Plans for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men* (1997-2000, 2003-2006) only a few policy measures addressed men and, overall, men were not considered as having problems of reconciling work and family life.

Women were generally represented as a homogeneous group supposedly sharing the same problems of caretaking/work responsibilities, and as such the "working mother" operated as an exclusionary norm. The tax reform from 2002 is a clear example; *Act 46/2002* gave working mothers the right to a subsidy of €100 per month for each child under three years of age, "with the aim of compensating for social and labour-related costs derived from maternity". This reform (re)produced the normative assumption of women, and not men, as caregivers albeit addressing only mothers with formal employment, excluding various groups of women from benefits: unemployed women and workers in the submerged economy (often migrant and working-class women). Definitely, the benefit resounded with the norm of women's participation in the labour market.

Families' freedom of choice in organizing the balance between work and care was a central value. The focus on families' free choice was rather contradictory with the focus on working mothers, because it emphasized that families should be free to decide on how to organize the balance between work and care and, hence, also to decide on the participation or absence of women/mothers in the labour market. Solutions to the problems of reconciliation were framed in terms of "family responsibility". "Intergenerational solidarity" was also emphasized, which reinforced the responsibility associated with the work performed by grandmothers for their grandchildren or daughters caring for their elderly parents. The family was considered the guarantee of social cohesion and the future well-being of the nation was articulated as in the hands of families. The claim that the family is the key to solve social problems enhanced individual and family responsibility over state responsibility. In other words, care work

was articulated primarily as a private problem and not as a public concern. However, state intervention was understood as necessary to help families carry out their role (as caregivers) and to guarantee their freedom of choice.

The issue of reconciliation of work and family life continued to be a salient issue during the Socialist government from 2004 and onwards. Working mothers were still a central category, but the lack of “co-responsibility” between women and men was articulated as a policy problem on the agenda. There was a new emphasis on fathers’ role in child care. *Act for effective equality between women and men* (3/2007) introduced an individual right to paternity leave, which was represented as the most innovative measure to promote greater co-responsibility between women and men in assuming family obligations. Although recognizing the role of fathers in care, the right to two weeks of paternity leave represented a symbolic rather than substantial change. Co-responsibility was an important norm in order to achieve women’s increased participation in paid employment, again the key to gender equality. Women’s improved “employability” was emphasized; thus, the goal was to increase women’s adaptation to labour market requirements. The reverse adaptation, private companies and employers’ overall adaptation to the requirements of care was not expressed as an aim. Additionally, the problem was framed within a heteronormative discourse, taking for granted the heterosexual dual earner family, marginalizing single parents and heterosexual families.

White, autochthonous, heterosexual working mothers were constructed as the explicit or implicit norm. Working mothers represented the normative subject position from which it was legitimate to speak of the problem of reconciling work and family life. This analysis is not trying to say that working mothers do not need the support of the welfare state policies that facilitate combining paid and unpaid work, surely they do. But categories of class, race/ethnicity and sexuality were rendered irrelevant in this discourse in which all “working mothers” were considered to share the same problems in combining work and care.

On the margins of the reconciliation debate, “immigrant women” emerged as a category attributed great problems of reconciling work and care. While the policy debate on reconciliation produced a homogeneous category of women, implicitly referring to Spanish women, the *Strategic Plan for Citizenship and Integration (2007-2010)* focused on the problem of unequal distribution of care and domestic work in immigrant families. While the plan constructed reconciliation as a problem of integration, it produced a homogenous category of “immigrant women”. The plan did not refer to an actual study on immigrant women and their problems of reconciliation but was based on general assumptions of immigrant women (and, implicitly, immigrant men). Aspects, never raised in relation to Spanish women, were added to the problem: inequality in decision-making and income distribution and that immigrant women do *all* the care work. The problem clearly exacerbated dominating representations of reconciliation in the general policy debate, producing an image of migrant families as a site of greater gender inequalities than Spanish families. These representations produced an image of the “Third-World woman” as the oppressed “other” (Mohanty 1994). The plan did not consider differences among immigrant women and it kept silent on the role of migrant women in facilitating the reconciliation of work and family life of Spanish women and men, while their own families often remain in their home countries. Obviously, migrant women may also define themselves as “working mothers”, but dominating policy

discourses on the reconciliation of work and family life did not recognize them as subjects of gender equality policies and their reconciliation problems were generally not considered.

5.3 Dependent care: creating rights to receive care, marginalizing the care workers

5.3.1 Policies surrounding dependent care

Care became a central issue on the political agenda with *Act 39/2006, of 24 December, for the promotion of personal autonomy and attention to dependent persons* enacted during the Socialist government. The Act was adopted by the parliament on November 30th 2006 and came into effect in 2007 and onwards. The so-called “Dependent Care Act”, which was supported by all the major parties in the parliament, assigned certain state responsibilities in providing care for dependent persons. Thereby, the often invisibilised issue of elderly care work and care for persons with disability became a burning issue. The Act laid the foundations of the *System for Autonomy and Care for Dependent Persons* (SAAD), which was defined as the fourth pillar of the Spanish welfare state. The approval of the Act implied an expansion of the Spanish welfare state and increased resources destined to care for the elderly and persons with disability. Today the economic crisis and cuts in social spending certainly affect the implementation of the reform though.

Elderly care has gotten the attention of public policies in Spain since the end of the 1980s. The *Gerontology Plan (Plan Gerontológico)* was adopted in 1992 and this was the first time that the issue of elderly care was dealt with in a global way by the government. However, many of the measures were not implemented due to the lack of financing and the increasing division of competencies between the state and regional levels. In any case, the plan became the point of departure when “dependent care” was increasingly debated. The issue of dependent care was formally incorporated into the Social Dialogue with trade unions and employers’ organizations in 2001. Later on, in 2003, the issue of dependent care was incorporated into the negotiations related to the Toledo Pact, which analyzes the structural problems related to the Social Security system and its potential reforms (Marbán 2009: 207-8). Additionally, there have been legal reforms dealing with the rights regarding unpaid leaves to care for dependent family members (The Reconciliation Act 39/1999 and the Equality Act 3/2007).

A commission for dealing with the issue of Dependent Care was created already during the mandate of the Conservative Party. The renewal of the Toledo Pact in 2003 was approved in the parliament with the recommendation to create a system that would deal with the issue of dependent care in a global way. No legislative project was presented, however. Rather, the Act came about in a context where the Socialist Party governed and there were strong interests in the issue of dependent care among the trade unions and organizations representing the elderly and persons with disability. A White Paper for Dependent Care was elaborated in 2004 on the initiative of the Socialist government and it was published in 2005 (IMSERSO 2005). A negotiation including the trade unions, the employer’s organizations and the government used the white paper as the point of departure as they developed some of the main ideas of the future law. A more inclusive negotiation, however, started once the government bill on the project was

presented (Marbán 2009: 220-1). The actors that were given a permanent voice in the Advisory Committee were mainly market actors (employers' organizations and trade unions). Organizations representing the elderly and persons with disability were consulted and women's organizations were largely excluded.

The Dependent Care Act introduced a universal right granted to all individuals who suffer from a certain level of dependency: moderate, severe, or great dependency. It was specified that dependent persons referred to elderly and persons with disability while regular child care was not included, only care for children between 0-3 years of age with severe disability. The Act declared that the state needed to guarantee minimum standards for all "citizens". A requirement was to have been a resident in Spain during at least 5 years and two years just before the application of benefits⁵². The Act involved two groups of measures: on the one hand, the promotion of public care services (mainly public centres and home assistance) and, on the other hand, the more controversial allowances for the family caregiver (López et. al. 2007: 8). The services would involve home-help, personal assistants, special homes, day centres and phone assistance. The Act explicitly prioritized public services and economic benefits were articulated as "exceptional". The economic benefits would be destined to personal assistants of greatly dependent persons and to care in the home performed by the so-called "non-professional carers".

The Act established two categories of care. Professional care (*cuidados profesionales*) was defined as "provided by a public institution or organization, either non-profit or commercial, or by an autonomous professional specialized in providing care services". "Non-professional care"⁵³ (*cuidados no profesionales*) was defined as the attention given to dependent persons in their own homes, by persons from their families or their "surroundings", not linked to professional services. Hence, the professional character of care was not made dependent on the qualification, training, education and experience of the caretaker but related to the public/private divide; public entities, companies, NGOs, on the one hand, and the private sphere of the family and its "surroundings", on the other. The figure of the "non-professional" caregiver was linked to the measure of allowances for care in the family. Although not entitled to a proper salary, the non-professional carer was to be incorporated into the Social Security system⁵⁴.

The Act was approved by all the parties except for the Basque Nationalist Party *PNV* and the Catalan Nationalist Party *Convergència i Unió* who argued that the Act invaded competencies of the regional governments. The competencies of the regional governments can also be seen as one of the reasons why the Dependent Care Act created a separate system, rather than including the issue of dependent care in the Social Security system. It is the regional governments, *Comunidades Autónomas*, which have the competencies in the field of social assistance and health provision. Major differences between regions have been found in studies of the implementation of the law (Marbán 2009; Martínez Buján 2007).

⁵² When it came to non-citizens, residents in Spain during at least 5 years, the text referred to Act 4/2000 on rights and liberties of foreigners in Spain without specifying their potential rights to benefits.

⁵³ The category "non-professional" care was called "family care" in the parliamentary debates and the draft bill. *Proyecto de ley 121/000084 Promoción de la autonomía personal y atención a las personas en situación de dependencia. Boletín Oficial de las Cortes Generales, 5 de mayo de 2006.*

⁵⁴ Established in *Real Decreto 615/2007 de 11 de mayo*.

One of the most controversial aspects of the Act was its financing. The financing of the system would occur through a shared responsibility between the national and the regional level. The national administration would finance a minimum of services and benefits covering basic needs and the regional administrations would contribute to the system with a similar amount of resources and for this the state would need to establish special agreements with all the 17 regions (*Comunidades Autónomas*). The cost was also to be shared between the state and the person receiving care and would depend on the type and the cost of the care services and the income and patrimony of the beneficiary (Salido and Moreno 2007: 110). To a certain extent, the Dependent Care Act introduced a citizen right that can be compared with those rights related to education and healthcare; yet, an important difference is the major contribution required by the individual beneficiary within the area of dependent care (Marbán 2009: 209). After the adoption of the Dependent Care Act, critical voices have emphasized the lack of funding and regional differences. In the parliament issues such as common quality criteria, regional inequalities, lack of resources to promote individual autonomy, and the dividing of the financing of the law between the central and regional governments have been disputed.

The organizations representing dependent persons⁵⁵ and the regional governments of the *Comunidades Autónomas* were strengthened through the process of negotiations. In the end the Act was articulated in accordance with the quasi-federal state rather than representing a recentralizing force. In concurrence with the nationalist regional governments the system created through the Dependent Care Act was not called the “National System of Dependent Care”, as planned, but the “System for Autonomy and Care for Dependent Persons”. The very definition of “dependent care” was also controversial. The organizations representing the elderly and persons with disability raised several issues during the negotiations and were able to contribute to making several important changes in the government bill (ibid. 234-5). Due to the influence of these organizations, the Act was named “*Act for the promotion of personal autonomy and care for dependent persons*” instead of simply the “Dependent Care Act”, thus drawing attention to both situations of dependency and the struggle for autonomy (Marbán 2007). As mentioned above, the main trade unions were also active in the negotiations and they had an important role in marginalizing issues related to women’s care work (Marbán 2009: 216). Such issues were mainly raised by the feminist movement.

In debates on the “Dependent Care Act” the feminist movement argued for a fully public and universal right to receive the needed care (Peterson and Orozco 2008). The Act was highly criticized by the feminist movement for reproducing the norm of care work as “women’s work” with measures that strive to help women to continue caring, in notably precarious conditions, like the allowances for the family caregiver. From the feminist movement criticism was also directed towards implications related to class and nationality (Asamblea Feminista de Madrid 2006a, 2006b). Class-related implications of the limits to the principle of universal rights were pointed out. The great majority of households with low and average incomes would still have to pay a significant amount for public services. Also, the Act was said to be limited in terms of migrants’ rights to care services and it was argued that there is a risk that the Act will exclude those who

⁵⁵ Among them we can find several platforms and councils: Plataforma de ONG de acción social, Consejo Estatal de Personas Mayores, Consejo de ONG de Acción Social, Comité Español de Representantes de Personas con Discapacidad (Marbán 2009: 216).

frequently perform care work from the right to be cared for in the future (Peterson and Bustelo 2007). The feminist movement did not have a prominent voice in the negotiations of the law so these critical points were hardly listened to.

Many different aspects influenced the creation of the “Dependent Care Act”: the role of the “care deficit”, insufficient social services, the increasing political interest in dependent care among political representatives and civil society, and the incorporation of the Spanish debate into the context and policies of the European Union (Marbán 2009: 208). The White Paper for Dependent Care from 2005 underlined the aspiration to converge with the advanced welfare states in the EU, referring, among others, to the “pioneers” of the Nordic states. The “European social model” was referred to as a normative model in that it allegedly guarantees social protection for the elderly populations. The European Union has promoted increased cooperation in elderly care of the member states. While the organization of health care systems, their funding (public/private funding) and planning according to the needs of the population constitute a responsibility of the member states, this responsibility is exercised within a general framework on which EU policies have a bearing: research, public health policy, free movement of persons and services, viability of public funds, etc. The European Commission has identified three long-term objectives for national systems, which should be pursued by the member states: accessibility, quality and viability (European Commission 2001). These recommendations also guided the debates preceding the Dependent Care Act (Rodríguez Cabrero 2007: 71). The Act referred to the European Union as a legitimate voice in defining the problem and it emphasized its policy recommendations on elderly care.

5.3.2 A problem of “dependent persons”

Act 39/2006, of 14 December, for the promotion of personal autonomy and care for dependent persons definitively put care for dependent persons on the political agenda. The Dependent Care Act assigned state responsibility in providing care for dependent persons. A new, supposedly universal, citizen right was adopted in order to guarantee minimum national standards in the care for dependent persons. The care for dependent people was represented as one of the major problems and challenges of “developed countries”. The Act framed the problem in this way:

The care for dependent people and the promotion of their autonomy constitute one of the principle challenges of social policy in developed countries. The challenge is nothing else but attending to the needs of those who, because of their situation of special vulnerability, require support to carry out essential daily life activities, to achieve more personal autonomy and to be able to exercise their citizen rights.
(Act 39/2006)

A core problem therefore was the lack of care provision to cover the needs of dependent persons. Consequently, the aim was to create a minimum and universal right to receive adequate care at a national level. The cause of the problem was defined in terms of “social and demographic changes”. The Act described the social context in which the

problem had emerged, pointing out that families, and especially women, used to take care of dependent persons, but then the family model has changed and women are entering the labour market. With an ageing population the group of dependent persons is increasing but women can no longer carry out the care work as before due to their incorporation in the labour market. This gap in care provision was thus a central problem.

The subject was referred to as dependent persons or “persons in situation of dependency”. The general goals related to this category were “human rights”, “equal opportunities”, “quality of life”, “real equality”, “non-discrimination”, “dignity in treatment”. The problem of dependent care was defined as a problem strongly related to age and elderly people. A range of problems that affect dependent people were mentioned: the lack of autonomy, the situation of vulnerability, the need for care in daily life, and the problems specifically related to old age. That dependent persons lack equal opportunities and have difficulties in exercising their citizen rights were represented as problems.

A central and explicit norm in the Dependent Care Act was “autonomy” (or autonomous people). A fixed dichotomy between dependent people (the problem group) and autonomous people (the norm group and goal) was established. Article 2 defined the concepts of dependency and autonomy:

Dependency: a state of permanent character in which people are, for reasons of age, disease or disability and linked to the lack or loss of physical, mental, intellectual or sensorial autonomy, in need of attention from another person or persons or important support to carry out basic activities of daily life or, in the case of people with intellectual disability or mental illness, other support to achieve their personal autonomy. (Act 39/2006)

Autonomy: The capacity to, on one’s own initiative, control, confront and take personal decisions about how to live one’s life according to one’s own norms and preferences and to carry out basic activities in daily life. (Act 39/2006)

The new citizen right aimed at overcoming dependency and obtaining autonomy or, alternatively, living with dignity. At the same time, several aspects made this clear-cut dichotomy between dependency and autonomy problematic. The Act presupposed the autonomous individual as the norm, hence not considering people as interdependent, not taking into account that all people go through periods of enhanced “dependency” throughout their life span. The Act considered dependency as a permanent state and, at the same time, it promoted autonomy for dependent people. The dichotomy of autonomous/dependent can be said to construct a hierarchy between the norm group and the “needy”. Scholars have criticized the concept of dependency as an issue on the political agenda given that the result is a political program that reproduces inequalities and power relations. Carol Bacchi and Chris Beasley (2005) argue in favour of the concept of “human embodied interconnection” in order to challenge the idea that some groups depend on other groups, and to challenge discourses on privilege and exclusion. Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon (1997) show through their genealogy of dependency how the meanings of the concept have changed through U.S. history and how the changes reflect some major socio-historical developments. One of their critical points is that the use of dependency to describe a problem tends to make them appear as individual and not

structural problems. What is more, they argue that dependency has often meant subordination. They put forward an idea of “interdependence” in order to critically address the dichotomy of dependent/autonomous. In the policy debates surrounding dependency the concept was not questioned and the ideal of autonomy was assumed as an unmitigated good by all the political parties. The organizations representing elderly and persons with disability questioned the idea of “dependent persons” (although not the dichotomy of dependency/autonomy) and as mentioned above, thanks to the influence of these organizations, the Act was named Act for the promotion of personal autonomy and care for dependent persons instead of simply Dependent Care Act.

5.3.3 Dependent care: citizen rights and gender inequality

Equal treatment was considered in the Act, promoting “equal opportunities” for dependent people. The Act stated that the care for dependent persons and the promotion of personal autonomy should be oriented towards improving quality of life and personal autonomy in the framework of effective equal opportunities. It was also stated that dependent people should not be discriminated because of their sexual orientation or identity.

In other words, inequality was represented as a problem but the focus fell on “dependent persons”, and not care workers, and the problem mainly referred to the lack of equal opportunities and difficulties to exercise citizen rights and the aim of equal social rights to receive care. Both the Act and the parliamentary debates preceding it generally represented care as disconnected from gender and gender (in)equality and the role of caregivers was marginalized. The Act ignored gender in spite of its principle of “inclusion of a gender perspective” and the aim of taking into account “women and men’s different needs”. The Act used a “neutral” masculine language even as it referred to the “care worker” (*el cuidador*). The potential situation of (inter)dependency of unpaid female caregivers or paid migrant domestic care workers was ignored.

The dominant issues discussed in the parliamentary debates were the financing of the law, the nature of the new “universal” right, and the tension between state and regional competencies. Across all the political parties, the “family-friendliness” of the new policy was emphasized. Articulating the Dependent Care Act as favourable to families might be understood as a way to legitimate the project as the government sought a wide political consensus including the approval of the Conservative Party in the opposition.

The Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, however, labelled the Act as a “gender equality project” given the fact that women constitute the majority in care work. By attributing state responsibility in care provision, the Act would enable women to participate in the labour market and reconcile personal, family and work life. Gender equality was hence defined in terms of women’s possibilities to participate in paid employment and to combine employment and care. This way the articulation of gender (in)equality coincided with the dominant way of framing the problem in the reconciliation debate.

This project, apart from creating a new social right, apart from constituting an authentic family policy, is an equality project, because it will have a positive and intense impact on hundreds of thousands of women, since the care for dependent persons will become a right provided for by the public administrations. Many women who until now have taken responsibility for the burden of caring for dependent family members –83 percent of family carers are, precisely, women– will now be able to enter the labour market in equal conditions, or reconcile their personal, family and work life, and those who, for some reason, have difficulties in their access to employment will receive training and adequate social protection. We then make professionally and socially visible the work that in the past was not even considered as such. (Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Jesús Caldera, Parliamentary Debate 22 June 2006)

The quote entails a vision of the state as a “women-friendly” welfare state which would help liberate women from “care” and allow them to “work”. The key to gender equality is women’s participation in the labour market. The way equality was articulated enhanced a non-questioned male norm to which women should adapt in order to be “equal”. In the debates related to elderly care, care work was definitely defined as women’s work and men’s care work was an absent issue. The construction of care as women’s work was not questioned as it was in the debate on reconciliation and co-responsibility. There was no rejection of the (re)production of care work and domestic work as exclusively female tasks. Due to the way in which the problem was framed in the Dependent Care Act and the parliamentary debates, the expectation on women to care for elderly parents or relatives was not challenged. This reflected the impossible choice of *not* caring. Critical left-wing voices in the parliament would however represent the exploitation of women’s unpaid care work in the family as “undignified” for the modern Spanish society and with high personal costs for women. They also celebrated the Act in the name of the “female caregiver” (*mujer cuidadora*) – women who have dedicated their lives to caring for family members. But, the sexual division of labour was not questioned in the issue of elderly care.

By and large, care for the elderly was thus disconnected from the problem of gender inequality and the construction of care as (migrant) women’s work was disregarded. Nevertheless, in the *Strategic Plan for Equal Opportunities* (2008-2011) the policy regarding dependent care was framed as promoting gender equality, on the basis that the Act “recognizes and economically supports care workers” and that it promoted “the professionalization of the care for dependent persons”, detaching care work from traditional notions of family care.

The precarious allowances for the -mainly female- family caregiver and the absence in the debate of the category of domestic care workers constitute a clear indication of the marginalization of certain groups of care workers. As we have seen above, the Act established two different and gendered categories of care work: first, professional care (*cuidados profesionales*) which was defined as provided by a public institution or organization, either non-profit or commercial, or by an autonomous professional specialized in providing care services; and second, non-professional care (*cuidados no profesionales*), which was defined as the attention given to dependent persons in the home, performed by persons from their families or their “surroundings”, not linked to professional services. The figure of the “non-professional” caregiver was related to

allowances for family care. Non-professional caregivers should register with the Social Security but they were not attributed the right to a proper salary for care work but a support⁵⁶. In 2008 the maximum allowance for non-professional care of a very severely dependent person was €506.96 per month⁵⁷. The two categories can be seen as hierarchically organized with family care as subordinated to professional care, with professional care associated with skilled work and non-professional care work related to unskilled work. The family allowance can also be associated with the idea of a salary to female caregivers often criticized by feminists, especially liberal feminists, for reproducing care work as women's work. While the employment of (often migrant) domestic workers for elderly care is frequent at the level of practice, the category of domestic workers was absent in the Act and the parliamentary debates.

In sum, although the Act visibilised care as a policy problem, it marginalized issues surrounding care workers such as their rights, salaries and working conditions (Pérez Orozco and Baeza 2007). In fact, the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs justified the new policy as a gender equality project but, at the same time, he also legitimated the Act in terms of its contribution to economic growth and employment.

This is an Act that regulates a new social right, which implies a correct family policy, which works in favour of equality and which stimulates economic growth and employment as well... this allows me to assert with clarity that we are facing a productive expense, an investment that will generate employment and economic activity, apart from creating a new model of social protection. (Minister of Labour and Social Affairs Jesús Caldera Sánchez-Capitán, Socialist Party, Parliamentary Debate 22 June 2006)

Thereby, the problem of dependent care was situated within a neo-liberal discourse constructing economic reasons as a priority over gender equality and social citizenship. Such a discourse on the welfare state will most likely be reinforced in the current context of economic crisis.

5.3.4 From family to state responsibility in elderly care

The White Paper for Dependent Care, elaborated before the government bill, stated that the reform would advance in "social justice", making public institutions responsible for the work women have traditionally performed and guaranteeing the care for dependent persons. In the parliamentary debates preceding the new policy the Act was represented in terms of progress in the Spanish welfare state, except for the MPs representing the Basque and Catalan nationalist parties which opposed the Act. Elderly care or, more

⁵⁶ It was later on established that non-professional carers should be registered within the General Regime of the Social Security system, not the Special Regime for Domestic Workers. *Real Decreto 615/ 2007, de 11 de mayo, por el que se regula la Seguridad Social de los cuidadores de las personas en situación de dependencia.*

⁵⁷ *Real Decreto 7/2008, de 11 de enero, sobre las prestaciones económicas de la Ley 39/2006, de 14 de diciembre, de Promoción de la Autonomía Personal y Atención a las personas en situación de dependencia para el ejercicio 2008.*

specifically, the care for dependent persons had previously been dealt with basically on regional and local levels. In order to guarantee citizens sufficient resources and services state intervention was considered necessary. The principle policy measure was the creation of the System for Autonomy and of Care for Dependent Persons, which was ascribed the role of developing care provision and protection for dependent people. The state was represented as having an important role of guaranteeing citizens' basic conditions in the promotion of autonomy and attention to dependent persons. All public institutions would be involved and should cooperate and coordinate activities. The regional administrations had, due to their competencies, an important role in implementing the law and could also provide wider social protection and services than the basic rights guaranteed by the state at the national level. The public administrations should promote training and qualifications for professionals and caregivers. The Act explicitly recognized the role of private companies and voluntary work/NGOs; hence, the market was constructed as vital in care provision.

An ageing population, shifts in the family model and women's entrance in the labour market were changes that explained the shift towards more state responsibility in elderly care. State responsibility in care provision emerged as a necessity given the unsustainability of the traditional system of care. In other words, the social changes forced the state to assume enhanced responsibility in a task that families (and especially women) had managed until that moment. One could also speak about a "care crisis", although the Act did not mention this problem in such terms.

The care for this group of the population, thus, turns into an unavoidable challenge for the public authorities, which requires a firm, sustained and adjusted response to the current model of our society. One should not forget that, until now, it has been the families, and especially women, who traditionally have taken care of dependent persons, which constitutes what has come to be called "informal support". The changes in the family model and the progressive incorporation of almost three million women, in the last decade, in the labour market introduce new factors in this situation which makes a reform of the traditional system of care essential in order to secure an adequate capability of care provision for those who need it. (Act 39/2006)

It was argued that through the shift from family to state responsibility care for dependent persons would no longer be a "private" issue or problem.

The care for dependent persons, for persons that cannot manage on their own, will stop being something private of Spanish families to become part of the benefit rights of the public administration, of the public authorities. We will convert into public benefits a right of persons to receive what was before located in the private sphere. (Jesús Caldera Sánchez-Capitán, Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Socialist Party, Parliamentary Debate 22 June 2006)

The enhanced role of the state in care provision involved a shift-away from the dominating view of elderly care as almost exclusively a family matter, constructing care as a public concern. But the norm of "state responsibility" co-existed with a continuing focus on "family care". There was a lack of coherence between the goal of assuming a public responsibility for the provision of care and the measures established by the Act which inhibited such public responsibility: the strong reliance on "non-

professional”/family caregivers, the high level of beneficiaries’ contributions and the privatized nature of the incipient fourth pillar of the welfare state attributing an important role to market solutions. The Act promoted dependent people to stay in their “usual environment” as far as possible. At the same time, allowances for family care should, according to the Act, only be exceptional in relation to care services. Nonetheless, critical voices have pointed out that cash-for-care schemes have really been the rule rather than the exception.

At the same time, previous policies still in operation fomented and legitimized “private” solutions in elderly care. Leave of absence without pay (*excedencias*) appeared in the Reconciliation Act and the Equality Act as a viable solution to elderly care. The Reconciliation Act 39/1999 extended the rights to reduction of the working day and to unpaid leaves of workers who had to take care of the elderly and sick, “in line with the demographic changes and the ageing of the population”. Workers have the right to a leave of absence during a period that does not exceed one year to care for a family member for reasons such as age, accident or illness and who cannot take care of her/himself.

5.3.5 Summary

Care for dependent persons became a central issue on the political agenda with *Act 39/2006 for the promotion of personal autonomy and attention to dependent persons*. The Act laid the foundations of the System of Autonomy and Attention to Dependent People (SAAD), which was defined as the fourth pillar of the Spanish welfare state. A new, allegedly universal, citizen right was adopted in order to guarantee a minimum national standard in the care for dependent persons. Care provision was represented as one of the major problems and challenges of developed countries with ageing populations. The reform framed the problem in terms of the needs of dependent persons in the Spanish welfare state. State responsibility in care provision emerged as a necessity given the unsustainability of the traditional family-centred and informal system of care.

Inequality was represented as a problem, but the focus fell on dependent persons and mainly referred to the lack of equal opportunities and difficulties to exercise citizen rights. Inequality did not concern care workers. Both the Act and the parliamentary debates preceding it generally represented care as disconnected from gender and gender (in)equality and caregivers were marginalized. The Act ignored gender in spite of its principle of “inclusion of a gender perspective” and the aim of taking into account “women and men’s different needs”. Rather, the “family-friendliness” of the Act was emphasized. The dominant issues discussed in the parliamentary debates were the financing, the nature of the new “universal” right and the tension between the state and regional competencies.

The Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, however, labelled the Act as a “gender equality project” given the fact that women constitute the majority in care work. By attributing state responsibility in care provision, the Act would enable women to participate in the labour market and reconcile personal, family and work life. Gender equality was hence defined in terms of women’s possibilities to participate in paid

employment and combine employment and care. This way the articulation of gender (in)equality coincided with the dominant way of framing the problem in the reconciliation debate. A vision of the state as “women-friendly” emerged: the state would help liberate women from “care” and enable them to “work”. The way equality was articulated enhanced a non-questioned male norm to which women should adapt in order to be “equal”. Elderly care work was definitely defined as women’s work and men’s care work was an absent issue. In contrast to the debate on reconciliation and co-responsibility which rejected the (re)production of care work and domestic work as exclusively female tasks, the sexual division of labour was not questioned in the issue of elderly care.

The enhanced role of the state in care provision involved a shift away from the dominating view of elderly care as almost exclusively a family matter; care for dependent persons would no longer be a “private” problem, but a public concern. But the emphasis on “state responsibility” co-existed with a continuing focus on “family care”. Critical feminist voices have pointed out that the allowances for family care have actually become the rule rather than the exception, as stated in the Act. The precarious allowances for family caregivers and the absence in the debate of the category of domestic care workers are a clear sign of the marginalization of certain groups of women. The Act established two different categories of care work. Firstly, professional care (*cuidados profesionales*) was defined as provided by a public institution or organization, either non-profit or commercial, or by an autonomous professional specialized in providing care services. Secondly, non-professional care (*cuidados no profesionales*) was defined as the attention given to dependent persons in the home, by persons from their families or their “surroundings”. The figure of the “non-professional” care worker was linked to allowances for the family caregiver. Non-professional caregivers should register with the Social Security but they were not attributed the right to a salary for care work but a “support”. The family allowance can be associated with the idea of a salary to female caregivers often criticized by feminists for reproducing the care work as women’s work. Although the Act visibilised the care as a policy problem, it marginalized issues surrounding care workers such as their rights, salaries and working conditions. While the employment of domestic care workers for elderly care is frequent at the level of practice, the status of domestic workers was an absent issue in the Act.

5.4 Domestic service: domestic (care) workers as the invisible “other” in gender equality policies

5.4.1 Policies surrounding domestic service

Domestic service has not been constituted as a contentious policy problem in Spain and debates surrounding paid domestic work have been marginal on the political agenda. Nevertheless, domestic workers’ rights have appeared from time to time on the agenda and the Socialist government has just recently come to an agreement with the main trade unions, the General Workers’ Union *UGT* and Workers’ Commissions *CCOO*, to reform and improve the status of domestic workers in the Social Security system.

The existence of a *Special Regime for Domestic Workers* established in *Act 1424/1985*⁵⁸ provides an important background for this issue. Since 1985 this Social Security regime has regulated employment in domestic service providing far less social protection than the General Regime of the Social Security system. When it comes to the social security contributions that employers and employees are required to pay, the Special Regime requires lower contributions. The protection offered is consequently weaker: the Special Regime for Domestic Workers does not include unemployment benefits, professional illnesses and accidents are not recognized, there is no cover in case of sickness until day 29, up to 45% of the salary can be paid in kind, not all time of required presence at work needs to be considered paid working hours and the retirement pension is extremely poor. The employer is required to pay Social Security contributions only if the number of working hours exceeds 20 per week. There is no obligation to draft and sign a written employment contract, but only to come to a mutual verbal agreement, which leaves the employee in a weak position (León 2010; Colectivo IOÉ 2001). Although the Special Regime was created in the late 1960s to protect those working in private homes with no formal recognition, domestic work was not recognized in the labour law until 1985. Before then, domestic service was regulated by the civic code. At the time of the adoption of the Special Regime for Domestic Workers, it was, to a certain extent, considered a progress since there had been no labour regulation before and the national Women’s Institute had been involved in the negotiations. Still, the 1985 regulation, which established the contractual aspects of domestic employment, defined private homes as “exceptional contexts”: by appealing to the priority of rights of privacy and private family life over labour rights, workers’ rights were subordinated to employers’ rights. Additionally, the recognition of this exceptional character by the 1985 regulation meant that domestic employment would not be included within the Workers’ Bill of Rights (León 2010: 414-5).

The Special Regime has been widely criticized. In fact, in 1995 the European Commission held that the Special Regime for Domestic Workers violates the European Directive on equal treatment of men and women, and particularly the Directive 79/7/EEC

⁵⁸ *Real Decreto 1424/1985, de 1 de agosto, por el que se regula la relación laboral de carácter especial del servicio del hogar familiar.*

on equal treatment in the Social Security system. The Special Regime for Domestic Workers was considered a discrimination against women and the regulation of sick leave benefits - starting from day 29 in the case of domestic workers - was regarded as direct discrimination (PATH 2003). The main trade unions *UGT* and *CCOO* have supported initiatives to incorporate the Special Regime into the General Regime. But the fact that domestic workers have not been represented by trade unions in collective agreements has been an obstacle to the promotion of the demands of this group on the political agenda (León 2010: 416). Indeed, the major trade unions have been criticized for ignoring the problems of domestic workers by domestic workers' organizations and the feminist movement.

In the context of passive trade unions, other organizations, such as domestic workers' organizations, NGOs and religious organizations, have provided assistance to domestic workers, often undocumented migrants. A Platform for Associations of Domestic Workers (PATH) has been established and within this platform there are atypical domestic workers' organizations, such as Association of Domestic Workers of Vizcaya which is linked to the feminist movement and engages domestic workers as well as women who have never worked in the sector. The advocacy for a change in the Special Regime for Domestic Workers has existed within the women's movement for a long time, but paid domestic (care) work is an issue that has been far less prominent than women's unpaid work in the home or "family care"⁵⁹. In any case, there has been a joint mobilization surrounding the issue of domestic service by the feminist movement and domestic workers' organizations. In March 2010 a demonstration in Madrid demanded "the end of slavery" for domestic workers. The situation of domestic workers was also the focal point of research, conferences and meetings organized by UN-INSTRAW in Spain (Instraw 2009).

As an international pressure for reform, a landmark treaty setting standards for the treatment of domestic workers was adopted in 2011 at the General Conference of the International Labour Organization (ILO 2011a, 2011b). The Convention and the accompanying Recommendation on decent work for domestic workers aim to protect and improve the working conditions of domestic workers worldwide. The Convention recognized the significant contribution of domestic workers to the global economy, which in turn involves increasing paid job opportunities related to family responsibilities, caring for ageing populations, children and persons with a disability. It also highlighted that domestic work continues to be undervalued and invisible and is mainly carried out by women and girls, many of whom are migrants particularly vulnerable to discrimination and human rights abuses. Domestic workers were recognized as workers entitled to the minimum legal protections that all other categories of workers enjoy. Hence, the states signing the Convention committed to take appropriate measures, in accordance with national law and regulations, to ensure that domestic workers enjoy conditions that are not less favourable than those applicable to workers generally in respect of Social Security protection.

The Socialist government promised in 2007 to improve the conditions of domestic workers by reforming the Special Regime and eventually incorporating it in the General Regime according to the Toledo Pact. One of the main points of the Toledo Pact was

⁵⁹ Interview with Isabel Quintana, May 6th 2006.

precisely to simplify the system and integrate the Special Regimes⁶⁰ into the General Regime of the Social Security system. The Toledo Pact, approved by the parliament in 1995, promotes an analysis of structural problems of the Social Security system in order to find solutions and reform the system. Hence, the integration of the Special Regime for Domestic Workers into the General Regime has been endorsed within this framework. The proposal to equalize the working conditions and social rights of domestic workers with other employees affiliated to Social Security has also been pushed by the regularisation process of migrant workers throughout the domestic work sector carried out in Spain in 2005 (León 2010: 415). Additionally, the Government Plan for Human Rights from 2008 addressed the issue of domestic workers within the area of labour related rights, stating the intention to reform the Special Regime and to integrate it into the General Regime.

The economic crisis emerged as an obstacle for a potential reform of the Special Regime, and yet there have been steps taken to improve domestic workers rights⁶¹ and the reform is now in progress. The reform has taken place as part of wider legal reforms of the labour law and, most importantly, the pensions system. In 2010 the government carried out a controversial reform of the labour law through *Act 35/2010*, as a response to the economic crisis and international and European pressures. The reform has been criticized for weakening workers' rights in general, but it limited the possibilities to pay workers in kind, including domestic workers⁶². A general reform of the Special Regime is now under way. A Government bill with the objective to up-date, adapt and modernize the Social Security system⁶³ was presented with the main motivation to reform the pensions system. The integration of the Special Regime for Domestic Workers into the General Regime was added to this reform as an amendment. In August 2011 the Social Security Reform Act was adopted⁶⁴. The date set for the integration is the 1st of January 2012. By 2018 domestic work shall be fully adapted to the General Regime and its rules on Social Security contributions. However, the General Regime will establish special rules applied to domestic workers in a Special System for Domestic Workers. For instance, domestic workers will be excluded from the right to unemployment benefits. At

⁶⁰ The special regimes were created to reflect the extraordinary and atypical circumstances of certain groups of workers such as miners, farmers, sea workers, the self-employed and household employees (León 2010: 411).

⁶¹ A parliamentary bill formulated by the Basque Nationalist Party *PNV* to work towards the improvement of the social protection of domestic workers was adopted: *Proposición no de Ley 162/000562 presentada por el Grupo Parlamentario Vasco (EAJ-PNV), relativa a la regulación legal del servicio doméstico. Boletín Oficial de las Cortes Generales, 21 de septiembre de 2010*. The proposal included various points: to follow the recommendation of the Toledo Pact from 2003 to integrate the Special Regimes in the General Regime, to increase the control of domestic work agencies, to take action against the submerged economy, and to inform domestic workers and their employers of their rights and obligations.

⁶² The salary paid in kind is not permitted to exceed 30% of the salary. Moreover, the monetary payment cannot be lower than the minimum wage.

⁶³ *Proyecto de Ley sobre actualización, adecuación y modernización del sistema de seguridad social*

⁶⁴ *Ley 27/2011, de 1 de agosto, sobre la actualización, adecuación y modernización del sistema de seguridad social*.

the same time, according to *Act 40/2003*, “large families”⁶⁵ (*familias numerosas*) have the right to a tax credit for the employment of a domestic care worker, covering 45% of the employer’s Social Security contributions. This credit is intended to remain as the reform of the Social Security integrates domestic workers into the General Regime. Furthermore, while the reform of the Special Regime is important it should not be forgotten that there is a strong presence of the sector in the underground economy. Domestic employees officially registered with Social Security within the Special Regime were 280,000 in 2009. In comparative terms though, the number of regular domestic employees is higher than in any other European country (León 2010: 409).

Domestic service has been framed as an issue of domestic workers rights but hardly as an issue of gender (in)equality. In the national Plans for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men there have been some, but very few, references to paid domestic work. The *Third Plan for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men (1997-2000)* included a measure to “study” the Special Regime for Domestic Workers and “evaluate its functioning”. The plan also included the measure to promote the qualifications and training of women in those professions that constituted “new fields of employment”, implicitly referring to care work in private households among other types of the so-called proximate services. With the Reconciliation Act from 1999 the right to maternity leave included workers registered with the General Regime as well as the self-employed and workers in the Special Regime for Sea Workers and the Special Agricultural Regime. However, workers registered with the Special Regime for Domestic Workers were still not included in the right to maternity leave. During the elaboration of the Equality Act in 2006 and 2007 various feminist organizations demanded that the new law should deal with the Special Regime for Domestic Workers, requiring that domestic workers get the same rights as workers in the General Regime of the Social Security system. Nevertheless, the Equality Act from 2007 generally ignored the issue of domestic workers’ rights; only one measure specifically targeted domestic workers and that was the right to maternity leave which was recognized also for domestic workers registered with the Special Regime.

5.4.2 A “different” kind of work

In spite of the ongoing changes, there has been very little policy debate surrounding domestic service and domestic workers rights. In that sense paid domestic work has been a marginal issue on the political agenda. In the parliament domestic workers’ rights were set in the centre of debate at one occasion in the last fifteen years, in June 2005, in relation to a potential reform of the Special Regime⁶⁶. The debate emerged as the Galician Nationalist Party *BNG* presented a parliamentary bill on the improvement of the

⁶⁵ *Ley 40/2003, de 18 de noviembre, de Protección a las Familias Numerosas*. The definition of large families includes families with three or more children. Since 2011, also single parent families with two or more children are included.

⁶⁶ *Proposición de ley 122/000109 Relativa a la mejora de la acción protectora del régimen especial del servicio doméstico. Presentada por el Grupo Parlamentario Mixto. Boletín Oficial de las Cortes Generales, 22 de octubre de 2004.*

protection of the Special Regime for Domestic Service. The proposal involved equalizing the social protection of the Special Regime for Domestic Workers with the protection provided by the General Regime of the Social Security system. There was a general agreement among all the political parties that the Special Regime was obsolete and, yet, at that time the majority voted against taking the proposal into further consideration, including both the Socialist Party *PSOE* and the Conservative Party *Partido Popular*, mainly referring to economic reasons. The analysis of the issue of domestic service here focuses on this parliamentary debate⁶⁷.

The proposal involved equalizing the social protection of the Special Regime for Domestic Workers, which meant, among other things, introducing unemployment benefits, recognizing the right to benefits due to professional illnesses and work accidents and compensating for the lack of Social Security contributions in the pension system. The parliamentary debate entailed a dispute about the nature of domestic service. As we have seen, the Social Security system has constructed paid domestic work as different from “normal” types of work. The different character of domestic work was acknowledged by all the political parties in the parliamentary debate. One MP emphasized that paid domestic work was different because of the servitude historically inherent in this work.

One of the paradigmatic elements defining the rights of the worker is that the connection between a worker and an employer is characterized by the definition of dependence. In the field of work of the female and male workers who provide domestic service, the dependence entails conceptual dimensions that are particularly different from what the jurisprudence of the Constitutional Court has established in this area. The dependence is not only performing work for a salary; we are here talking about a concept of dependence that resembles...the times of the heritage of the first-born son, the dependence of the Lords and the Masters, with a totally different dimension, an absolutely irregular dependence which does not belong to the requirements of judicial order. (MP Emilio Olabarria Muñoz, Basque Nationalist Party *PNV*, Parliamentary Debate 21 June 2005)

In contrast, another MP used the notion of paid domestic work as “different” in a way that can be seen as justifying different working conditions; reinforcing the idea that there can be no distinction between “life” and “work”:

The necessity of a Special Regime is obvious. On the one hand, the employer is not really an employer but rather a head of family who does not profit in a stringent sense from the work but this assistance covers an apparent need in our society, and the employed person is often used as a substitute when work is not compatible with family life... we have an employee that offers assistance in a very specific context, at times within a frame of confidence/distrust and familiarity, where not all time of presence is real work, where the framework of rights is relative, and where life and work are intimately connected to the point that one can often not distinguish between them. (MP Joan Tardá I Coma, Catalanian left-wing party *Esquerra Republicana*, Parliamentary Debate 21 June 2005)

⁶⁷ The recent reform of the Special Regime has not been debated in the Congress but in the Commission for Labour and Immigration. The records were still not available at the time of submitting the thesis.

The different character of domestic work was enhanced by all the political parties. Domestic work was definitively not “just another job” but there were conflicting interpretations on the reasons why. Many studies have engaged in disputes whether domestic work is different in nature or can be considered just another job. I think that the crucial question is not whether this work is *a priori* and essentially different or not, but how this work has been constructed as “different” or as “just another job” in specific contexts, and the consequences of such representations. The framing of paid domestic work as different is problematic in the sense that this difference may justify different rights. And when the framing of paid domestic work as an essentially different kind of work legitimate weaker social rights this definitively does not challenge the history of servitude and colonialism (see Martín Casares 2005) of the domestic service sector.

5.4.3 Domestic service, workers’ rights and gender inequality

The phenomenon of global care chains, with poor women migrating to richer parts of the world to perform care work, can be seen as particularly significant in Southern European contexts where public child and elderly care provision is scarce and family care and market solutions often dominate. Nevertheless, (migrant) domestic workers did not appear as subjects in the policy discourse surrounding care. In policy discourse surrounding the reconciliation of work and family life the focus fell upon women’s formal labour market participation and women’s unpaid care and domestic work. Domestic workers were not the subject of policy reforms and their work was not discussed in terms of gender (in)equality. The (re)production of the sexual division of labour, along divisions of class, race/ethnicity and nationality, by transferring care and domestic work to “other” women, was not questioned, which can be exemplified by this quote:

We have for many years fought for equal rights for men and women, but we ought not to forget an inequality which for me is very important and that is the one existing between women themselves: not all women who find work have a salary that allows them to have someone else working at home. (MP Michaela Navarro Garzón, Socialist Party, Parliamentary Debate, 13 May 2003)

Here, domestic workers were represented as a solution to women’s double workday, although accessible only to more economically privileged women. That this “someone else” is usually a woman, often of working-class and migrant background, was disregarded, and the conditions and rights of this work sector were ignored. Class inequalities were used here to legitimize the call for more resources to be invested in the welfare state and especially in public child care. However, class inequalities did not refer to class divisions between employers and domestic workers. Notably, the notion of “class” was hardly ever used in the debates.

Likewise, the employment of domestic workers for elderly care is a common practice and was fomented through the introduction of the family allowance in the Dependent Care Act, but domestic workers were ignored in the Act which defined care as “professional care” or “non-professional family care”, not mentioning the category of

domestic care workers. As we have seen, the Act marginalized issues related to care workers and their rights, salaries and working conditions. The construction of care as (migrant) women's work was not challenged.

In the parliamentary debate surrounding domestic service in 2005, however, the problem of female domestic workers' lack of rights was discussed. The MP that represented the party that had elaborated the parliamentary bill, the Galician Nationalist Party, argued that improving the conditions of paid domestic work was about justice for the women working in the sector and equality between domestic workers and other workers. While the Socialist MP did not see gender inequality as a problem, but emphasized class divisions referring to economic inequality due to the low salaries in the domestic work sector, the Conservative MP recognized that domestic work was a feminized and undervalued work. The Left Party MP highlighted the discrimination of women in the Spanish economy and pointed out that the augmentation of the number of migrant women in the sector of domestic work was creating a new kind of social and economic inequality and that this would affect the integration of these women and their families in a negative way. He referred to the extraordinary regularization process in 2005, where great part of the workers achieving work permits were domestic workers:

The regularization has incorporated a new kind of sex-based discrimination in the labour market. It could be stated without risk of being mistaken that the regularization has been excessively precarious and contrary to the rights of female migrant workers, which adds to the discrimination that autochthonous workers in this sector already suffer, impeding full work participation and, thereby, effective social integration of these workers and their families. (MP Ángel Pérez Martínez, Left Party, Parliamentary Debate 21 June 2005)

The assumption that there had been a shift from Spanish women working in domestic service, as a "complement to the male breadwinner", to migrant women working to maintain their families served as an argument to explain why there was a need for improved social protection:

So, it is evident that the level of needs of those traditional women in domestic service, who frequently contributed their salary to a family unit where there already existed a husband's principal salary and where the level of need, for that reason, was lower in the case of losing the income, has nothing to do with the situation of needs of today's domestic workers. The profile has changed and so the social protection has to change too. (MP Joan Tardá I Coma, Catalanian Left Party *Esquerra Republicana*, Parliamentary Debate 21 June 2005)

Domestic work can be qualified care work but is often labelled as "unskilled" and, thus, its little value is somehow legitimized (Lister et. al. 2007). Little attention was paid to the need for a higher social value of this work in the debate on domestic service. But the MP of the Basque Nationalist Party argued that given the social changes towards a dual earner family, domestic work had "changed in nature", increasingly involving child care. The changing character of the work should also result in a higher valuation of the work; child care should be more highly valued than regular domestic work (such as cleaning) because it is more "sophisticated", thus associated with more "skilled" work:

Nowadays, in a situation where there are children to educate, and both spouses, the male and the female spouse, fortunately work outside home, the workers [male and female] that provide domestic service have achieved a much more sophisticated dimension when it comes to the work to perform and they are made responsible for the care, protection and development of the children. This attributes to the core of the work to perform a particularly relevant dimension that is not duly valued... in the legislation that regulates the work of these workers. (MP Emilio Olabarria Muñoz, Basque Nationalist Party *PNV*, Parliamentary Debate 21 June 2005)

The precarious conditions of migrant women workers, often inserted in certain kinds of feminized jobs or “work niches”, would later on be articulated as a policy problem in the *Strategic Plan for Citizenship and Integration (2007-2010)*. Migrant women are usually inserted in precarious and low valued work. Domestic service can be seen as a major “labour niche” for female migrants, although the plan omits to mention this.

The real possibilities of labour insertion of immigrant women are limited to sectors and activities that are little recognized, often precarious and generally worse paid, which involves an increased risk for these women to find themselves in a situation of vulnerability with respect to invisibility and exclusion and, on the other hand, this does not generally correspond to their level of education or professional qualification. Specifically, data indicate that immigrant women are exposed to, from a labour point of view, discriminating conditions with regards to immigrant men who do the same work and, on the other hand, with regards to Spanish women, to low salaries or irregular salaries, precariousness and, in many cases, low protection in labour conditions (jobs with unstable contracts tend more often to be situated in the submerged economy), difficulties to occupy employments that are different from those called “labour niches” (employment sectors that are attributed little social value). (Strategic Plan for Citizenship and Integration, 2007-2010)

All in all, domestic service has been related mainly to the lack of workers’ rights. However, in the parliamentary debate two gender related aspects were mentioned: domestic service as socially undervalued feminized work, and the precarious conditions of female migrant domestic workers. In the parliamentary debate in 2005 all the political parties agreed on the need to improve the rights and conditions of domestic workers and, yet, the proposal was turned down at that time. Gender equality and domestic workers’ rights were not primary concerns, as we will see next.

5.4.4 Legitimizing private solutions

In the parliamentary debate on domestic service, the focus on domestic workers’ rights contrasted with a discourse that stressed the norms of “economic stability” and “employment”. The MPs also stressed middle-class families’ interests and “quality of life”. Domestic workers were debated in terms of providing solutions in the context of the care deficit, to help Spanish families and to facilitate the “reconciliation of work and family life”. How to satisfy the demands of middle-class families where both men and

women work was framed as a central issue. There was a general agreement that families need domestic workers; both left- and right-wing parties emphasized that the problem was not only about the lack of labour-related rights of domestic workers, but also about families' access to domestic workers.

In Spain families with three or more children can reduce their Social Security contributions by 45% if they hire a domestic worker (Lister 2007: 129). Within the discourse on economic growth and employment the MP representing the Conservative Party argued in favour of such subsidies to "large families"⁶⁸ (*familias numerosas*) for employing domestic workers, above all, because it would create new employment opportunities in the formal labour market:

This measure not only favours large families but also the employees, because it would make the submerged economy come to surface and, more importantly, it would generate new jobs. (MP Lourdes Méndez Monasterio, Conservative Party, Parliamentary Debate 21 June 2005)

There was a general agreement that families need domestic workers, but not all families' concerns were constructed as equally important. "Middle-class families" concerns were central; implicitly, well-off families would be able to hire a domestic worker in any case, and working-class families were not expected to have/need domestic workers anyway. It was argued that any reform of the Special Regime for Domestic Workers should, by no means, imply making the services more expensive for the middle-class.

On the assumption that we initiate a modification of the regime, this would permit us to tackle, on the one hand, the effective social protection that we think should be articulated in this matter and, at the same time... this should not in any case imply making these services more expensive for middle-class families. (MP Carles Campuzano I Canadés, Catalanian Nationalist Coalition Party *Convergència i Unió*, Parliamentary Debate 21 of June 2005)

Also the Left Party MP emphasized that the issue in stake was not only the labour-related rights of domestic workers, but also families' access to domestic care workers. Here, the lack of welfare state provision for dependent care was underlined as a justification to why families need domestic workers:

The labour reform of domestic service and its special characteristics, hence, is a necessity that should be considered since it is about a work sector that is very much linked to support to families with dependent persons in a context where these families enjoy scarce support. In short, the reform should improve the rights to equality of the workers and the rights of families to access a support in domestic work that does not penalize their possibilities of development and particularly their possibilities of reconciling work and family life. (MP Ángel Pérez Martínez, Left Party, Parliamentary Debate, 21 June 2005)

⁶⁸ Established in *Ley 40/2003, de 18 de noviembre, de Protección a las Familias Numerosas*.

While improving the rights of domestic workers should not put state finances in danger, domestic workers were seen as essential to solve the care problem and to improve the reconciliation of work and family life too, even more so in the future.

We should be aware that domestic work or employment will become more demanded in Spain due to the increasing incorporation of women in the labour market, as occurs in our neighbouring countries. It is work that every day becomes more necessary in order to better reconcile work and family life. (MP Lourdes Méndez Monasterio, Conservative Party, Parliamentary Debate 21 June 2005)

The legitimacy of private and individual solutions for care and domestic work were clearly reinforced in the debate, which affirmed that the welfare state was limited and that the domestic workers were needed to fill the gap. At the same time, one MP emphasized that the development of the Spanish welfare state and the increasing Spanish middle class were the reasons why Spanish households could now afford to have migrant domestic workers in the first place.

Gradually, there has been an increase of incorporations into this group of workers, mainly foreign persons, which is the result of the advances in the welfare state, and a result of our society becoming more bourgeois and of the improvement of the salaries of the citizens, which has led to a higher economic capacity to face the cost of [female] domestic workers, and logically also of the incorporation of native women into the labour market. In fact, the domestic work of native women is more and more often being replaced by remunerated tasks performed by a [female] worker, often immigrant, who for a rather low salary is willing to perform the little recognized domestic tasks that we natives are not prepared to assume. (MP Joan Tardá I Coma, Catalanian Left Republican Party *Esquerra Republicana*, Parliamentary Debate 21 June 2005)

In the context of scarce public care provision, we can of course see why domestic workers were seen as necessary for Spanish families. Yet, the acceptance of private and individual solutions for care seems to reinforce the legitimacy of the “non-caring state”. Emphasizing Spanish families’ access to (migrant) domestic workers can be seen as legitimizing limited state responsibility and scarce welfare state provision. The discourse clearly privileged middle-class women and men’s interests over the rights of female migrant domestic workers. None of the MPs intervening in the parliamentary debate on the Special Regime referred to the demands of those organizations and associations that work in favour of the rights of domestic workers, and the discourse focusing on the employers and their reconciliation problems did not appear to provide much space for migrant domestic workers’ voices (see also de los Reyes and Mulinari 2005). Neither did the MPs refer to the European Union as a legitimate voice as frequently occurred in the debates related to reconciliation and dependent care, thereby avoiding the issue of the Spanish law violating the EU anti-discrimination directive.

5.4.5 Summary

Paid domestic work has been framed as “different” from real work. In 1985 the *Special Regime for Domestic Workers (Act 1424/1985)* was established regulating social protection of domestic workers and providing far less protection than the General Regime of the Social Security system. This Special Regime does not include unemployment benefits, there is no cover in case of sickness until day 29, employers are required to pay Social Security contributions only if the number of working hours exceeds 20 per week, there is no obligation to draft and sign a written employment contract, retirement pension is extremely poor, etc. The Socialist government has recently come to an agreement with the main trade unions, the General Workers’ Union *UGT* and Workers’ Commissions *CCOO*, to reform and improve the status of domestic workers. The Social Security Reform Act adopted in 2011 integrates the Special Regime into the General Regime of the Social Security system. Still, in spite of the importance of domestic workers in care provision and the particularly precarious status of domestic workers in the Social Security system, there has been very little policy debate on the issue.

The analysis of the issue domestic service focuses on a parliamentary debate from 2005 that set the issue of domestic service in the centre of dispute. Domestic workers’ rights were debated in relation to a proposal presented by the Galician Nationalist Party to reform the Special Regime for Domestic Workers. In the parliamentary debate, the different character of domestic work was acknowledged and reinforced by all the political parties. Domestic work was not just another job, but there were conflicting interpretations on why and what should be done about it. On the one hand, it was argued that paid domestic work was different because of the servitude historically inherent in this work. On the other hand, it was argued that paid domestic work was different because of the sphere in which it is performed: the private sphere of the home. This was used to explain the existence of different social rights.

In the parliamentary debate inequality was mainly represented in terms of lack of workers’ rights. But improving the conditions of domestic work was also about justice for the many women workers in the sector. Domestic service was recognized as feminized and undervalued work. The shift from Spanish women, supposedly working in domestic service as a complement to the male breadwinner, to migrant women working to maintain their families, served as an argument to why there was a need for improved social protection and working conditions. It was argued that the augmentation of migrant women in the sector of domestic work was creating a new kind of social and economic inequality and that this would affect the integration of these women and their families in a negative way. At the same time, the changing character of the work towards more skilled work (care work) should lead to a higher valuation of the work. Indeed, all political parties agreed on the need to improve the rights and conditions of domestic workers, but the parliamentary bill was turned down and the reform process did not come about until six year later.

Equality and domestic workers’ rights and working conditions were indeed not primary concerns in this parliamentary debate. Domestic workers’ rights contrasted with a discourse that stressed economic growth, stability and employment. The MPs also stressed middle-class families’ interests and quality of life. There was a general agreement that families need domestic workers; both left- and right-wing parties

emphasized that the question was not only about labour-related rights of domestic workers, but also about families' access to domestic workers. How to satisfy the demands of middle-class families where both men and women work was framed as a central issue. It was argued that any reform of the Special Regime should by no means imply making the services more expensive for families. While improving the rights of domestic workers should not put state finances in danger, domestic workers were seen as essential to improve the reconciliation of work and family life, and even more so in the future. In the context of scarce public care provision one can understand why domestic workers were seen as necessary for Spanish families. But the emphasis on Spanish families' access to (migrant) domestic workers can also be seen as legitimizing limited state responsibility. The acceptance of private and individual solutions for care and domestic work seemed to reinforce the legitimacy of the "non-caring state".

All in all, when domestic service has appeared on the agenda it has mainly been framed as an issue of workers rights. Domestic service has hardly ever been framed as an issue of gender inequality in public policies. In other words, domestic (care) workers are the invisible "other" in Spanish gender equality policies (Peterson 2007). The perpetuation of the sexual division of labour, along divisions of class, race/ethnicity and nationality, by means of transferring care work and domestic work from Spanish men and women to "other" women, was hardly ever disputed or challenged. In the debates on "reconciliation of work and family life" and "dependent care" the figure of the domestic worker was almost entirely ignored. The dominant way of framing the reconciliation of work and family life enhanced the working mother/parent combining care and formal employment as a norm. Thereby the way in which the welfare state often relies on the precarious paid work of female migrant domestic workers was overshadowed.

5.5 Conclusions

In the following sections I will present the conclusions and reflections drawn from study of the framing of gender inequality in Spanish politics of care. I will first discuss the ways in which the Spanish policy debate has framed the problem of reconciling work and family life as a key issue for gender (in)equality, making “working mothers” the legitimate subjects of equality policies. Then I will focus on the framing of the problem of dependent care, mainly related to elderly care, an issue that has generally been detached from the problem of gender inequality and which further marginalized female care workers. Finally, I will centre upon the debate surrounding domestic service and on how domestic workers were the invisible carers, constructed as the “other” in gender equality policies while economic concerns and middle-class families’ reconciliation problems prevailed.

5.5.1 Reconciliation of work and family life

When the issue of reconciliation of work and family life emerged on the agenda during the Conservative government, it was framed as a working mother’s issue. Women should have children but women’s place was considered to be in the labour market. Women’s increased labour market participation was both a fact (women had been massively incorporated in the formal labour market) and a norm (women should be working outside of home). An important element in the policy discourse was the emphasis on women’s labour market participation as the key to gender equality. The dominant discourse of gender equality emphasized the norm of inclusion, underlining that women should be integrated into formal employment on an equal footing with men, but without questioning masculine norms. The problem representation of gender inequality was situated within a liberal discourse emphasizing economic growth and modernization. Modern working mothers’ combining professional careers and caring for children became the legitimate subject of gender equality and the symbol of national progress. The policies on reconciliation privileged those who had a formal employment, thereby excluding certain groups of women: unemployed women and employees of the informal sector, often working-class and migrant women. The problem representation of the unequal distribution of care and work responsibilities between women and men contrasted with the lack of policy measures addressing men. Additionally, the framing of reconciliation as a working mothers’ matter and the key to gender equality contrasted with the normative assumption of family responsibility in care and the discourse on families’ “freedom of choice” and “intergenerational solidarity”, which (re)produced the sexual division of work. A dual earner model was promoted, but the solutions were primarily individual, not collective. Although often implicitly, the heterosexual family was articulated as the norm, presupposing that families are constituted by a man and a woman, a mother and a father, marginalizing single parents and homosexual families.

During the Socialist government the reconciliation of personal, family and work life was a salient issue. “Working mothers” were still the legitimate subject of these

policies and, in extension, of gender equality. But the focus was extended to fathers and the norm of “co-responsibility” was stressed. In the Equality Act co-responsibility referred to the sharing of care and domestic work between women and men; co-responsibility was seen as the key to achieve gender equality, and the new individual paternity leave was celebrated as a ground-breaking measure. At the same time, new pro-natal policies constructed women as essentially different, celebrating motherhood as well as working mothers’ contribution to the economy and national progress. Gender equality continued to be located within a discourse promoting economic growth and employment, promoting “equal opportunities” in the labour market and “women’s employability”; women’s adaptation to labour market requirements, not the reverse. With the Socialist government there was also an emphasis on the reconciliation as a public concern and state responsibility to provide solutions. This was articulated most clearly in the *Strategic Plan for Equal Opportunities* (2008-2011) which extended the idea of co-responsibility from the sharing of care and domestic work between women and men to “social co-responsibility”, including the responsibility of the state in conceding rights and providing care services and promoting corporate responsibility to facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life. Simultaneously, the concept of “family obligations” continued to be a common notion in legal texts and among both Conservative and Socialist MPs. And, in view of the economic crisis and cuts in social spending in Spain, it is most probable that individual solutions and family care will continue to dominate over “state responsibility” in the future.

In conclusion, the debates framing the reconciliation of work and family life as a policy problem have tended to enhance a dual earner model, emphasizing that today both men and women work and should work outside home. Clearly, this does not mean promoting an “adult worker” model given that the policy debates marginalize the position of single-parent families and start from the norm of two adult workers in the family. Nevertheless, this still indicates a shift-away from the norm of the strong male breadwinner model. The analysis situated the framing of reconciliation within a discourse on modernization and national progress. Women and “working mothers” were responsible for the choices of having children, for combining care with professional careers and, ultimately, for the social and economic wellbeing of the nation; working mothers were expected to be superwomen. Gender equality was associated with women’s participation in the labour market and economic growth. In the name of female emancipation, paid work was further appraised (Williams 2010; Fraser 2009). This way of framing gender inequality as a policy problem fits the liberal discourse of gender equality and the strategy of inclusion: women should participate in the labour market in the same way as men do. Women should become “employable” like men are. The association of paid work with success and emancipation overshadows problems of sex segregation, discrimination and precarious working conditions in work life. It articulates a vision of gender equality through the negation of class and through the denial of racism in work life (Bacchi 1999; Barker 2005). The analysis indicates that unequal power relations were ignored. Reconciliation was represented as both a problem and a solution; it seemed to be a rather harmonious dilemma, and everybody would win solving the problem. Men’s role in perpetuating gender inequality was avoided; masculine norms and work patterns were not really challenged and men were not constructed as subjects with responsibility for solving the problem.

The dominating discourse on gender equality operated to privilege some women and men and exclude or marginalize others. Since the emergence of the issue of reconciliation on the agenda the policy debate has produced a homogenous image of “women”, presupposing that women share the same problems and interests regarding care and work dilemmas. The analysis indicates that the category of women and the category of “working mothers” are clearly associated with a heteronormative discourse presupposing a heterosexual couple with children. The implicit normative subject in the debates on reconciliation of work and family are white, heterosexual, middle-class (or upper-class) autochthonous women. The analysis reveals that, while the discourse constructed the working mother as the legitimate subject of gender equality, other subject positions were eclipsed. Academic work on welfare states and global care chains has highlighted the way in which the Southern European welfare state relies on unpaid care work provided by women as mothers, daughters, spouses and grandmothers on the one hand, and paid domestic care work provided by female migrant domestic workers on the other hand. Various categories of female caregivers were marginalized while the focus fell upon the interests of “working mothers”. When migrant women emerged as a target group on the agenda within integration policies, they were depicted as a homogenous oppressed “other” in comparison to modern autochthonous women. Third-World women’s problems were linked to the lack of participation in care and domestic work of their male (migrant?) partners, and the problem of reconciliation of work and family life became a problem of integration. The role of migrant women in facilitating the reconciliation of work and family life of Spanish women and men, while their own families often remain in their home countries, was ignored. Obviously, migrant women can define themselves as “working mothers”, but overall the dominating discourse on the reconciliation of work and family life did not recognize them as subjects and the intersection of gender inequality with class and race/ethnicity was not considered.

5.5.2 Dependent care

Act 39/2006, of 14 December, for the promotion of personal autonomy and care for dependent persons put care for dependent persons on the political agenda and assigned state responsibility in providing care for dependent persons. A new, allegedly universal, citizen right was adopted in order to guarantee minimum national standards in the care for dependent persons. To find solutions to the care for dependent people was represented as one of the major challenges of developed countries.

The policy discourse surrounding dependent care constructed the problem as a matter of dependent persons, and the care workers remained in the shadow. Hence, equality was conceptualized in relation to the dependent person, considering norms such as “human rights”, “equal opportunities”, “quality of life”, and “non-discrimination” in relation to the person receiving care. At the same time, the Act presupposed the autonomous individual as the norm. The dichotomy of autonomous/dependent can be said to construct a hierarchy between the norm group and the “needy”. Given that the Act considered dependency as a permanent state, the goal of achieving autonomy for dependent people would be an unattainable ambition by definition. That people can be

seen as interdependent, all going through periods of enhanced “dependency” throughout their live span, was not taken into account. The potential situation of (inter)dependency of unpaid female caregivers or paid migrant domestic care workers was ignored.

In the Dependent Care Act and the parliamentary debates preceding the adoption of the Act, care for the elderly was disconnected from the problem of gender inequality and the construction of care as (migrant) women’s work was disregarded. Overall, the Dependent Care Act was articulated in gender-neutral terms, speaking about carers in their masculine form. Public intervention in elderly care provision was legitimized by emphasizing its “family-friendliness”. In this sense, the debate surrounding dependent care clearly differed from the debate on reconciling work and family life. However, the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs justified the legal reform by labelling it as a gender equality project. Then gender was constructed within a liberal discourse on equal opportunities in the labour market and the possibilities of reconciling work and family life. A vision of the welfare state as “women-friendly” emerged in the sense that the state would help liberate women from care to allow them to go to work. The way equality was articulated did not question masculine norms, rather, women should adapt to the labour market in order to be “equal”. Within this vein, the representation of gender (in)equality in the debate on reconciliation of work and family life and the debate on dependent care converged. But care for the elderly and disabled was not seen as an issue inherently intertwined with gender inequality the way child care was always represented as naturally related to gender inequality in the debates on reconciliation. The Strategic Plan for Equal Opportunities (2007-2010) referred to the new policy on dependent care as a gender equality policy that recognized care workers and promoted the professionalization of care work. But the precarious allowances for the (female) family caregiver established with the Dependent Care Act and the absence in the policy debate of the category of domestic care workers were a clear indication of the marginalization of the care workers. The family allowance has been criticized by feminists for reproducing care work as women’s work, with little value attached to it. While the employment of domestic care workers for elderly care is a frequent practice in the Spanish welfare state, the category of domestic workers was absent in the Dependent Care Act and in the parliamentary debates. Although the reform visibilized care as a policy problem, it marginalized issues surrounding care workers’ rights, salaries and working conditions.

The enhanced role of the state in care provision involved a shift away from the dominating view of elderly care as almost exclusively a family matter, constructing care as a public concern. But the norm of state responsibility co-existed with a continuing focus on family care and market solutions. Allowances for family care should, according to the Dependent Care Act, only be exceptional, in contrast to care services, but critical voices have pointed out that cash-for-care schemes have really been the rule rather than the exception. In the articulation of the new citizen right to receive the care guaranteed by the state, the allowances for family care in the home, public care services, privatized market-provided services and the third sector co-existed. At the same time, policies on unpaid leaves for family care articulated in the Reconciliation Act and the Equality Act continued to legitimize “private” solutions in elderly care.

5.5.3 Domestic service

Domestic service has been a marginal issue in policy debates in spite of the efforts of civil society actors and the feminist movement to put (migrant) domestic workers' rights on the political agenda. The existence of a *Special Regime for Domestic Workers* established in 1985 provides an important background for this issue since this Social Security regime provides far less social protection for workers than the General Regime of the Social Security system. Indeed, the European Commission has censured the Special Regime for Domestic Workers for violating the European Directive on equal treatment of men and women and, particularly, the Directive on equal treatment in the Social Security system.

As an international pressure for reform, a landmark treaty setting standards for the treatment of domestic workers was adopted in 2011 by the International Labour Organization. The Convention on decent work for domestic workers aims to protect and improve the working conditions of domestic workers worldwide and to ensure that domestic workers enjoy conditions that are not less favourable than those applicable to workers generally in respect of Social Security protection. Recently, the Socialist government has come to an agreement with the main trade unions, the General Workers' Union *UGT* and the Workers' Commissions *CCOO*, to improve the status of domestic workers by integrating the Special Regime into the General Regime of the Social Security system in accordance with the Toledo Pact. At the time of writing, the general reform of the Special Regime is under way. The integration of the Special Regime for Domestic Workers into the General Regime will come into force from January 2012 and onward. However, the General Regime will still establish special rules applied to domestic workers in a Special System for Domestic Workers. Future studies will need to examine the scope and effects of this reform.

All in all, when domestic service has appeared on the agenda it has mainly been framed as an issue of workers rights. In contrast, domestic service has hardly been framed as an issue of gender inequality in public policy. In other words, domestic (care) workers have been the invisible "other" in the Spanish gender equality policies (Peterson 2007). The perpetuation of the sexual division of labour, along divisions of class, race/ethnicity and nationality, by means of transferring care work and domestic work from Spanish men and women to "other" women, was hardly ever discussed, disputed or challenged. In the debates on "reconciliation of work and family life" and "dependent care" the figure of the domestic worker was almost entirely ignored. The policy debates surrounding the problem of reconciliation of work and family life linked gender inequality to women's *unpaid* care and domestic work. Thus, in spite of the importance of domestic workers in welfare provision at the level of social practice, there has been very little policy debate on the issue of *paid* domestic work. The dominant discourse on the reconciliation of work and family life enhanced the category of the working mother combining care and formal employment as a norm so that the ways in which the welfare state often relies on the precarious paid work of female migrant domestic workers were overshadowed.

A parliamentary debate from 2005 set the issue of domestic service in the centre of dispute and the in-depth analysis of this debate demonstrates dominant ways of framing the issue. Domestic workers' rights were debated in relation to a proposal presented by the Galician Nationalist Party to reform the Special Regime for Domestic Workers.

Inequality was mainly represented in terms of lack of workers' rights. But improving the conditions of domestic work was also about justice for the many women workers in the sector. Domestic service was recognized as feminized and undervalued work. The shift from Spanish women, supposedly working in domestic service as a complement to the male breadwinner, to migrant women working to maintain their families, served as an argument to why there was a need for improved social protection. The augmentation of migrant women in the sector of domestic work was said to affect the integration of these women in a negative way. All political parties agreed on the need to improve the rights and conditions of domestic workers, but the parliamentary bill was turned down and the reform process did not come about until six years later.

Equality and domestic workers' rights and working conditions were not primary concerns in this parliamentary debate. Domestic workers' rights contrasted with a neo-liberal discourse that stressed economic growth, stability and employment. The MPs also stressed middle-class families' interests and quality of life. There was a general agreement that families need domestic workers; both left- and right-wing parties emphasized that the question was not only about labour-related rights of domestic workers, but also about families' access to domestic workers. How to satisfy the demands of middle-class families where both men and women work was framed as a central issue. It was argued that any reform of the Special Regime should by no means imply making the services more expensive for families. While improving the rights of domestic workers should not put state finances in danger, domestic workers were seen as essential to improve the reconciliation of work and family life, and more so in the future. In the context of scarce public care provision one can understand why domestic workers were seen as necessary for Spanish families. But emphasising Spanish families' access to (migrant) domestic workers can also be seen as legitimizing limited state responsibility. The analysis shows that domestic service was constructed as a viable private solution to welfare state problems. The acceptance of private and individual solutions to the care deficit seems to reinforce the legitimacy of the "non-caring state".

6 Politics of care in Sweden

6.1 The Swedish welfare state in change: a context⁶⁹

In this chapter I analyze Swedish policy debates surrounding domestic service. More generally, the debates are about the social organization of care and domestic work and, hence, I use the notion of politics of care. The Swedish “maid-debate” provides an interesting contrast to the Spanish case study in that it turns domestic service into a contentious question with a prolonged debate in the parliament as well as in the political parties, among trade unions, feminists and civil society actors. The debate also deals with the other two issues analyzed in the Spanish case: the reconciliation of work and family life and dependent care. I will focus on how the issue of domestic service has been articulated as a policy problem of gender (in)equality since the beginning of the debate in the mid-1990s. The analysis mainly explores parliamentary debates surrounding the issue of domestic services and the introduction of a new policy on tax credits for domestic services in 2007, when the right-wing government replaced the Social Democratic government which had been critical towards such a policy.

Before entering the analysis of gender inequality in the debates surrounding domestic service, I set out to contextualize these debates in relation to the development and (re)construction of the Swedish welfare state. I will briefly review the ways in which the Swedish welfare state has been represented in welfare state research, where the Nordic model is often represented as the “best of worlds”: worker-friendly, family-friendly, women-friendly...

I will highlight the linkages between the development of the Swedish welfare state and gender equality and the issue of care and domestic work. This backdrop draws attention to the ways in which gender inequality and women’s care work and domestic work were historically constructed as public problems in Sweden. Policies have promoted a dual earner model with both men and women in paid work since the 1970s. The “caring state”, since the expansion of the welfare state, has involved a widespread public provision of child and elderly care. At the same time, fathers’ role in childcare has been an important issue on the political agenda, leading to an extensive gender-neutral parental leave and specific “daddy months”. Nevertheless, studies indicate that the boundaries have shifted away from state responsibility in certain areas of the welfare state since the 1990s and that in spite of the generous policies promoting the combining of work and family life women continue performing most of care and domestic work. Elderly care has been affected by the restructuring of the welfare state more than childcare. The family and, hence, most often women are expected to fill the gaps. In the context of economic difficulties, increased unemployment and welfare state restructuring, domestic service emerged as a more and more common phenomenon. Studies indicate that today also Sweden forms part of the “global care chains”.

⁶⁹ Different elaborations of the Swedish case study presented here have been published in articles and book chapters. See Peterson 2010, 2011, and Kvist and Peterson 2010.

As in the Spanish case study, I want to emphasize that the aim is not to provide a comprehensive overview of the research on the Swedish welfare state. Rather, drawing upon previous academic studies, this is a reconstruction of the Swedish context which provides a background to better understand and interpret the policy debates on domestic service. Furthermore, it is important to have in mind that the welfare state and its boundaries are continually re-negotiated.

6.1.1 The Nordic welfare state

The similarities across the Nordic welfare states have made scholars talk about a Nordic model. Sweden together with the other Nordic countries, Denmark, Norway and Finland⁷⁰, have been depicted as belonging to the same welfare state regime of generous, citizen-based universal welfare states.

Definitely, the Nordic welfare state has been characterized as the “best of all possible thinkable worlds” (Kangas and Palme 2005, in Lister 2009: 242). More than any other welfare state model, the Nordic model is not just a label applied by welfare regime analysts but is used with pride by Nordic governments and citizens (Lister 2009: 245). That all citizens are entitled to the same rights irrespective of their class or labour market situation has been regarded as the proof of superiority of the model (Anttonen 2002). The original passion for class equality was extended to embrace gender; gender equality has been regarded as an essential value to the Nordic model (Ellingsæter and Leira 2006). The Nordic welfare states are considered to be the ones that have moved furthest towards a dual earner model where both women and men are waged workers (Lister 2009; Leira 2006).

Gøsta Esping-Andersen’s work (1990) represents the Nordic welfare states as forming the Social Democratic welfare state regime⁷¹, characterized by a high degree of state intervention and a high degree of universalism and de-commodification. In the Nordic countries rights are based on citizenship (or residence) and are attached to individuals; the ideal is individual autonomy and dependence on the family is minimized. The Social Democratic welfare states have been regarded as the most “defamilializing”, providing a wide range of public social services and lessening the burden on families (Esping-Andersen 1999). The Nordic model involves a distinctive development of social protection in Europe since universal benefits and services are combined with earnings-related social insurance programs (Palme 1999, in Ellingsæter and Leira 2006). Rights are not primarily based on need, rather, with universal social rights the role of needs-based assistance is marginalized (Esping-Andersen 1999: 78). Services and benefits are designed for all citizens, and a large majority of the population uses them regardless of their social class (Anttonen 2002). Policies promote equality at the highest standards and not equality of minimal needs. Equality, solidarity and universalism are values that explicitly underpin the Nordic welfare state model. Esping-Anderson argues that the

⁷⁰ Iceland also belongs to the Nordic countries, but is seldom included in comparative analyses.

⁷¹ The Social Democratic welfare regime spans the period of time since the mid 1960s. The historical roots of the Nordic social policy were liberal with a legacy of nineteenth century poor relief (Esping-Andersen 1999: 78).

system is meant to promote cross-class solidarity and, thereby, solidarity of the nation (Esping-Andersen 1990: 25). This welfare state model crowds out the market and creates essential universal solidarity in favour of the welfare state; “all benefit, all are dependent; and all will presumably feel obligated to pay” (ibid. 28).

A focus on full employment is also characteristic of the Social Democratic welfare state regime. Employment is considered a right and an obligation for individuals. Esping-Andersen contends that the Social Democratic welfare regime has strongly put forward a norm of maximizing the productive potential of the citizenry and, hence, the goal is full employment while, at the same time, Social Security gives the right to de-commodification under legitimate circumstances. Since the Social Democratic welfare state is the most de-commodifying, it has also been regarded as the most “worker-friendly” welfare state (Nyberg 2002; Esping-Andersen 1990).

The emphasis on full employment implies that both men and women are expected to work outside home. Promoting women’s participation in the labour market, the Social Democratic welfare state takes responsibility for child and elderly care (Esping-Andersen 1990: 26-8). Public child care and elderly care services have long been the cornerstones of the Nordic welfare state. Universalism implies universal rights in social policy and universal rights to welfare services have been considered the guarantee of women’s right to paid work and to combine employment and care (Anttonen 2002: 76). While welfare states have often been built on the male norm of waged work, the Nordic welfare states have also facilitated women’s waged work (Lehto 1999: 168). Universalism has certainly been considered an integral part of the women-friendly welfare state. Social policy in the Nordic welfare states has been explicitly designed to maximize women’s economic independence (Esping-Andersen 1999: 45). Universalism has also been seen as the precondition of class equality. All social classes are offered and use public services, and services are the responsibility of local governments. Tax financing is the foundation of the Nordic welfare state regime and municipal taxes have been viewed as creating solidarity between people who live in the same community with respect to the funding of social services (Szebehely 2004, 1998; Anttonen 2002). High quality has characterized social services in the Nordic welfare states.

But the rosy image of the Nordic welfare state can be, and has been, challenged (as we have seen in chapter 3). Among other things, it has been pointed out that even in the Nordic countries universalism is not complete. Flat-rate benefits are much lower than earnings-related benefits (Anttonen 2002: 72). The principle of universalism is also weaker in care services for the elderly and stronger in childcare; the provision for frail elderly, whether institutional or home help, does not always meet the needs. Nor does the idea of equal services for rich and poor work in practice; private market services have always existed alongside public services. Importantly, the notion of universalism is strongly linked to citizenship and, therefore, means equality and solidarity *within* the nation, among citizens, not global solidarity (ibid. 77-8). Furthermore, neo-liberal discourses have legitimized a shift from emphasizing citizen’s rights to underlining citizen’s obligations (Lister et al. 2007: 62-3). The right-wing parties in government since 2006 have argued in favour of reducing state responsibilities, restructuring social benefits and services, fomenting private initiatives and emphasizing individual responsibility.

Although the Nordic welfare states share many essential features, scholars have also emphasized that there are important differences between the Nordic countries⁷². However, I will not engage in discussions surrounding the differences between the Nordic countries; in the following sections I focus particularly on the Swedish welfare state.

6.1.2 Developing the Swedish model

In the following paragraphs I will focus on how the Swedish welfare state model developed towards a universalistic dual earner model. Sweden has a long history of social policy facilitating family and work reconciliation. Family policy can be seen as crucial in the development of the Swedish “women-friendly”, dual earner welfare state (Lundqvist and Roman 2008). Today, public policies involve generous and flexible parental leaves, public child care has become a widespread practice and is guaranteed to all children (citizens and residents), and elderly care is provided through extensive public care provisions. Such policies have encouraged women to participate in the labour market and Sweden has one of the highest rates of female labour force participation in the EU (Lister et. al. 2007; Szebehely 2005; Boje and Leira 2000).

Sweden was not devastated by the world wars as so many other countries, and the economic development was therefore not disrupted. This influenced positively on the development of the welfare state and also on women’s situation. Sweden has been governed by a Social Democratic majority since 1932, with the exception of three periods: 1976–82, 1991–94 and 2006 until today. Social Democratic governments were the dominant force behind the social reforms (Esping-Andersen 1990, 1999). The concept of the people’s home (*folkhemmet*) has played an important role in the history of the Swedish Social Democratic Party and the Swedish welfare state⁷³. The concept emphasizes norms such as solidarity, equality, and universalism. It displays how the Swedish state is rooted in a collectivist tradition where the protection of collective rights is given priority over individual solutions and, within this framework, citizens trust public authorities and rely on universal social benefits and services. Furthermore, the “Swedish model” was built around a perception of having found a middle way between capitalism and communism (Scuzzarello 2008: 8; Lister et al. 2007: 62-3).

Historically, the Swedish people’s home was marked by a strong male breadwinner norm, with a clear division between the male breadwinner and the female caretaker, and the housewife ideology was strong in the 1950s. Social reforms ascribed state responsibility in cases where men failed to fulfil their role as breadwinners and women failed in their role as caretakers and homemakers (Hirdman 2007: 149). It should be noted that the dual breadwinner norm did not apply to working-class women, whose work

⁷² For analyses that explore the differences between the Nordic countries see, for instance, Lister 2009; Ellingsæter and Leira 2006; Szebehely 2004; Sørensen and Bergqvist 2002; Ellingsæter 2000; Greve 2000; Berqvist et. al 1999.

⁷³ Folkhemmet has been used to refer to the long period between 1932-76 when the Social Democrats were in power and the concept was put into practice.

outside home was taken for granted and regarded as natural because of their poor economic situation (Platzter 2006: 212). In the interwar period Sweden had one of the world's lowest birth rates and the framing of pro-natalist policies as a social welfare reform gained broad public support. Feminists, with the famous Social Democrat Alva Myrdal as the most prominent advocator, turned the question of women's right to work into a question of working women's right to have a family (Sundström 2003: 6). Although the joint taxation and the absence of parental leave and care services made employment difficult for women, the number of women in the labour market was increasing. Women's two roles as mothers and workers were highlighted by women in the labour movement and studied by researchers. Working mothers' situation was recognized as problematic and became the focal point of social and family policy. At the same time, social reforms aimed to support both employed women and women working in the household. Given the labour shortages, women were needed in the labour market and married women, housewives and immigrants became an important "reserve army" for the labour market (Lundqvist and Roman 2008: 223-4). In 1955 a three-month paid maternity leave was adopted.

The male breadwinner model was increasingly criticized. The political goal of gender equality arrived later than that of class equality, but gender equality (*jämställdhet*) increasingly superseded questions of equality between classes (*jämlikhet*). The idea that women ought to work outside home became the norm in the 1960s and questions regarding women's paid work became important objectives of political reform. In this context, employers and trade unions agreed on abolishing separate wage rates for men and women (Sundström 2003: 11). Public policies began to promote both women and men's combining of employment and parenting and explicitly encouraged a dual earner model (Nyberg 2002: 89). The Social Democratic Party anticipated many demands of the women's movement through relatively progressive policies (Lister et al. 2007: 62-3). While in the 1960 the Social Democratic Women's Organization favoured "family-friendly" social policies, the second wave of the feminist movement oriented the Swedish political debates towards the goal of gender equality at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s (Hirdman 2007: 160, 166).

The 1960s and 70s have been called the golden age of the Nordic welfare states. It involved an institutionalized welfare state with comprehensive policies including full employment, generous basic income security provided by the state, a tax system supporting production and redistribution, and a wage determination system that fomented the reduction of inequalities. Publicly subsidized child care, afterschool care and the right to work part-time with full job security and generous and flexible parental leaves were introduced. The reforms had a strong ideological support from the Social Democratic Party and feminists within the party. Welfare policies became inclusive of all classes since people with high income were brought into the system through the principle that benefits were related to income loss. At the same time, everyone was entitled to a basic guaranteed amount with respect to pensions, sickness insurance and parental leave (Hobson 2003: 78).

Most welfare reforms with explicit gender equality implications were introduced or expanded in this period. A huge expansion of social services in Sweden as well as in the other Nordic countries happened in the 1970s (Anttonen 2002). The expansion of home help for the elderly was important in that elderly care was no longer constructed as poor

relief, but a citizen right (Szebehely 1998). Before public child care services were widely extended, a common practice of child care was the subsidized care of *dagmammar*: parents organized child care by paying a woman, who stayed at home with her own small children, to take care of their children in her home (Nyberg 1999: 38). But with the expansion of public day care centres this arrangement became less common. The expansion of the public care sector created work opportunities for many women⁷⁴. Employment in the public sector entitled workers to social benefits and provided work opportunities particularly for women with low education (Öberg 1999). The creation of publicly funded care services was conceived as facilitating women's combining of paid employment and family life (Platzer 2004: 8). In other words, public care services were conceived as helping women to be able to work outside home by relieving them from care and domestic work; the public sector took over paid and unpaid domestic work and care for children, the elderly and disabled persons (Platzer 2006: 213). Unemployment rates were very low and when the labour market shortage became a problem, autochthonous women were preferred to increasing the number of immigrant workers. But the goal of women and men's equal participation in the labour market also shaped the policies. In other words, the expansion of the public sector was guided by egalitarian principles but, certainly, also by the aim of creating employment (Hobson 2003; Esping-Andersen 1999: 80).

Important reforms were based on the principle of gender neutrality, and gender equality as a norm was institutionalized. Since 1972 taxation is individual and not joint. The tax reform transformed the tax subsidy for the single earner –male breadwinner– into a tax penalty for single earner families. Subsidies do not specifically support single earner families, and there are child allowances (direct subsidies) rather than tax deductions for dependent children. Child care became an important political issue on the agenda in the 1970s and both mothers and fathers were seen as responsible for taking care of children. There was a wide political consensus on the need for public child care (Sundström 2003: 12). A political decision to widely expand public child care was taken in 1974. The “maternity leave” was replaced the same year with a 6-month “parental leave” that still exists today, although extended. The idea that public child care was in the best interest of the child became central and the norm of mothers' care within the male breadwinner ideology was dismissed as a myth. Public child care was argued to promote more democratic individuals, develop the child's potential and positively influence the child's psychological development. Also, sharing the care for small children between the mother and the father was articulated as necessary for gender equality and in the best interest of the child. The combining of work and family life was conceived as an issue that concerned both women and men. There were debates about quotas for fathers in relation to the gender-neutral parental leave, promoted by the Social Democratic Women's Associations. In 1979 parents of small children got the right to reduce their working hours from 8 to 6 hours a day and the Equal Opportunity Act was introduced, which prohibited gender discrimination in the labour market.

The optimistic view of the prospect of gender equality dominant in the 1970s was also challenged by Marxist feminist debates on domestic labour, and men's roles in maintaining unequal power relations were increasingly highlighted. It became clear that

⁷⁴ The proportion of women in the labour market increased significantly between 1970 and 1990, from 59% to 81% (Platzer 2006: 213).

although fathers had the opportunity to be caring fathers, women did most of the caring and domestic work in practice (Lundqvist and Roman 2008: 225-9). In the next section I will focus on the development of the dual earner model in Sweden.

6.1.3 A dual earner model, not a dual carer model

As have been pointed out before, Sweden is often characterized as the most “women-friendly” welfare state and as embodying the “dual breadwinner model” (Lewis 1992), the “Nordic model of social care” (Anttonen 2005) and the “caring state” (Daly, 2001). Overall, this implies that the state widely assumes responsibility for care provision, which is considered good for women. Sweden represents the country that has moved furthest away from the male breadwinner model towards a dual earner household, even among the Nordic countries (Leira 2006; Hobson 2003). Public policies, the tax system and the Social Security system favour dual earner families. In a similar vein, Sweden has been viewed as the country that comes closest to the dual earner/carer model. Both women and men have been entitled to be carers and earners, and the aim has been to enable women to become workers and men to become caregivers (Lewis 2001; Sainsbury 2000). Gender equality has been constructed as part of the national identity in Sweden, wanting to set an example for other countries and the EU (Towns 2002; Hobson, Lewis, and Siim 2002). In sum, the Swedish model has been considered the welfare regime that best promotes gender equality, a nearly utopian ideal (Bowman and Cole 2009: 169).

There is indeed a strong official commitment to gender equality as a dual earner/carer relationship between men and women (Sundström 2003). Welfare state policies involve both defamilialization, as in public child care services, and refamilialization, with an extensive parental leave and quotas for fathers (Leira 2006). The change in vocabulary from maternity leave to the gender-neutral parental leave reflected the importance of the discourse on shared parenthood (Lister et. al 2007: 121-3). The Nordic countries were the first to introduce rights in relation to fathers. The introduction of gender-neutral parental leaves in Sweden did not significantly alter the sexual division of labour, and since 1994 special periods of the leave have been reserved to the father (Saraceno 2008: 5). In spite of the debates, the idea of quotas in parental leave was not realized in the 1970s, but today two months of the parental insurance are earmarked for fathers, the so-called “daddy months” (*pappa månader*). The daddy leave is a non-transferable right of fathers and the legislation stipulates that if the fathers do not make use of their quota, this leave is lost to the family. The objective of gender equality was the motivation both when the first daddy month was introduced in 1994 and when the second one was introduced in 2002 (Lundqvist and Roman 2008: 230).

Parental leave rights are extensive, with a total length of 480 days⁷⁵ (68 weeks), including a maternity leave of 2 months and a paternity leave of 2 months (the “daddy

⁷⁵ The parental leave is 9 months with compensation of 80% of wages, plus 3 months with flat-rate benefit. The leave can be taken flexibly until the child is eight years old. To be entitled to this leave, at the beginning of the leave the employee must have been employed 6 months in a row, or at least 12 months during the last 2-year period. There is also a basic benefit level for those who are not entitled to the earnings-based leave (Ellingsæter 2009: 7)

months”). Benefits are linked to employment and income levels but there is also a minimum benefit to all parents on leave. Furthermore, a parent can demand part-time work until their child is eight years old. Also, parents are entitled to a 60-day temporal parental leave per year for each child under 12 years of age, which is for parental care if the child is sick (Björnberg 2002: 34). The long parental leave has been regarded as important to promote mothers’ return to the labour market (ibid. 39).

Female employment rates have been generally high: the employment rate was 73.1% in 1992, 72.2% in 2002 and 71.8 in 2007. The total employment rate was 74.2% in 2007, but has diminished a little in the context of the economic crisis, to 72.2% in 2009. By the end of the 1990s gender employment and unemployment gaps had almost closed and female unemployment rates were the lowest in the EU. The most recent data, however, show a small gap in employment rates; in 2009 women’s employment rate was 70.2 and men’s employment rate 74.2 (Eurostat 2010). The fertility rate has been relatively high in a European perspective: in 2006 the fertility rate was 1.85 (Ellingsæter 2009: 4). There are little differences in employment rates between mothers and non-mothers (Sundström 2003: 16). The activity rate of mothers⁷⁶ with children under six was 78% in Sweden in 2000 (OECD 2001, in Ellingsæter and Leira 2006: 10). At the end of the 1990s only 4% of Swedish women were full-time “housewives”. Employment implies great advantages since incomes are the bases for benefits. The most generous benefits are income- and work related: parental leaves, unemployment benefits, sickness benefits and earning-related pensions (Hobson 2003: 77-8).

Public care services are the cornerstone of the Swedish welfare state. The Nordic countries are among the member states closest to meeting the European Union targets for child care provision (Ellingsæter and Leira 2006: 265). Sweden has an extensive public child care system, and this institutional childcare is financed by taxes and parents’ contributions based on household income, the number of siblings enrolled, and the number of hours that the child spends in child care (Björnberg 2002: 35). The aim of child care has been to enable women and men to combine parenthood with employment, and to support children’s development through educational activities⁷⁷. Access to high-quality, state-subsidized child care services has for a long time been seen as a supplement for parental care as well as a democratic right of the child (Lister 2007:117; Szebehely 1998: 260). The right of the child has been emphasized, sometimes even more than gender equality. The right of the small child to parental care during early childhood has been a way of protecting the welfare of the child and to encourage bonding between parents and children. Child care has been regarded as a public guarantee of the welfare of children in terms of a redistribution of resources between children with different socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds (Björnberg 2002: 36). Municipalities have an obligation to provide day care services for children whose parents work or study or for children with a particular need for preschool activities; moreover, a place will be offered as near to the child’s home as possible⁷⁸.

⁷⁶ In Spain the rise of mothers’ participation in the labour market was gaining ground in the 1990s, and at that time the second and the third generation of working mothers were registered as employed in Sweden (Leira 2006: 30).

⁷⁷ It can be noted that, in contrast to Spain, grandparents provide no viable alternative to public childcare in Sweden given the high employment rates (Björnberg 2002: 39).

⁷⁸ This obligation is extended to children of unemployed persons or parents on parental leave, for a minimum of three hours per day. The municipalities are also obliged to offer child care (before and after

Public elderly care has not been articulated, in the same way as child care, as part of gender equality policies. But from a historical perspective the build-up of the public elderly care during the 60's and 70's contributed to women's rising labour market participation (SOU 2005). In comparison with other countries, Sweden and the other Nordic countries have also been characterized as having extensive public elderly care services with high-quality, qualified and publicly employed personnel. Care for the elderly is widely provided by municipalities and carried out by workers within the public sector. All social classes are offered and use these services. No direct legal responsibility for care of the elderly rests on the family and grown-up children in Sweden (Szebehely 2004: 184).

The dual earner model, however, is not the same as a dual carer model. Without a doubt, women still do the greater part of caring and domestic work, also in Sweden (Lister 2009; Szebehely 1998). Equal participation in the labour market does not translate into an equal distribution of unpaid work between women and men. This becomes clear from the division of the gender-neutral parental leave which has been continually expanded; mainly women take advantage of the parental leave. Men who do not use the paternity leave are now the exception rather than the norm. But in 2002 the proportion of the parental leave taken by fathers was 15%. Far from representing an equal sharing between men and women, it still represented an increase since the 1990s (Hobson 2003: 77). Recent data indicate that the share taken by fathers has increased to approximately 20% of the total parental leave days (Lister 2009). In any case, there seems to be a gap between the actual policies promoting shared parenthood and social practices. The norm of gender equality has been challenged by the idea of parental choice and the policy of home-based child care allowances⁷⁹ (Ellingsæter and Leira 2006: 7). Debates are going on between those who argue that a larger part of the parental leave should be individualized, thereby favouring more daddy months, and those who regard the division of the parental leave as belonging to the private family sphere (Lundqvist and Roman 2008: 230). The right-wing government is generally against the individualization of the parental leave but has introduced a "gender equality bonus", an economic benefit to motivate families to share the parental leave more equally (Lister 2009).

Women work part-time when they have small children more often than men. In fact, Barbara Hobson (2003) underlines that, rather than a dual earner model, Sweden has a one-and-three-quarters earner model given the fact that a significant portion of women work part-time. Even though women's home-based care has gone public and the dependence on the family or partners has decreased, women still take more responsibility than men for the informal care of the elderly (Lister et al. 2007: 62-3). While policies have been quite successful in supporting women as caregivers and workers, they have

school schedules) for school-aged children whose parents work or study. Municipalities apply a maximum fee for child care; the monthly fee depends on the income of the household but it cannot exceed 1260 SEK (approximately 126 Euros) (Ellingsæter and Leira 2006: 23).

⁷⁹ Childcare allowance was primarily promoted by the Christian Democrats but has been adopted as a policy by the centre-right government. The arguments for the local government childcare allowance was, among others, that it is discriminating that only some forms of childcare (i.e., public nursery schools) receive support and that an increased liberty to choose by definition is something positive. Others have criticized the policy from a gender equality perspective, arguing that it as a "women's trap". It is predominantly women who make use of the home allowances; nine out of ten are women (Lister 2009: 260).

been far less so in avoiding horizontal and vertical gender segregation in the labour market (Saraceno 2008: 10). In fact, the labour market is highly sex-segregated both horizontally and vertically by international standards. Women are likely to work in the public sector where leave arrangements are often more generous, and men in the private sector where pay is, on average, higher. Additionally, women are less likely to reach top positions. Nevertheless, the gender pay gap does not translate into such wide economic inequalities as segregated labour markets provoke in many other countries (Lister 2009: 258-9). While the welfare state has the potential to “liberate women”, scholars have also warned that it can (re)produce inequalities between women and men in new forms (Nyberg 2002).

The notion of the women-friendly welfare state has been contrasted with the idea of Sweden as the most “men-friendly” country in the world. Barbara Hobson (2004) refers to Sweden as a daddy-friendly society (*pappa vänligt samhälle*), underlining the need to question the focus on working mothers and the normative assumption of the women-friendly Swedish welfare state. She highlights the ways in which fatherhood has been constructed in the Swedish welfare state and how men have gone from breadwinners to potential caregivers. There has been a great consensus in Sweden on the importance of promoting men’s participation in caring for their children. In the debates in the 1990s men were often constructed as victims of structural constraints that involved stereotypes against men’s caregiving. While feminist groups struggled to alter power relations within the family, men’s groups focused on the need to reconstruct identities and masculinity. Swedish policies provide great support for men’s caring roles and their rights as carers are recognized. Yet, the distribution of paid and unpaid work between women and men is still unequal and fathers use far less of the parental leave than mothers. At the same time, fathers have stronger rights in relation to the custody of children in Sweden than in most other countries in the world. There is a strong norm of shared custody which strengthens fathers’ rights in legal disputes in cases of divorce. Additionally, the law has not put much pressure on fathers to pay child maintenance after divorce; the state pays the greater part of the costs (Hobson 2004: 100-1). In sum, Swedish fathers have the most extensive care-related rights and, at the same time, rather few obligations in terms of economic maintenance. While in many countries debates have revolved around the absent or negligent father, Swedish debates have constructed a positive view of fathers and their engagement in care.

The Swedish model has focused on social policy and particularly on combining of work and care as the means to achieve gender equality. At the same time, if we look more deeply into other gender-related problems, Sweden and the other Nordic countries may not seem so women-friendly. The Nordic countries have in general been slow in acknowledging and in addressing gender-related violence. In other words, from a comparative perspective, the Nordic welfare states look very different when seen from the point of view of gendered violence and not of the combining of employment and care (Kantola 2006). Gender conflict has traditionally been downplayed in Swedish politics, but since the 1990s men’s violence against women has become a central policy problem, with the introduction of the Gross Violation of a Woman’s Integrity Act from 1998 and an advisory National Council on Violence established in 2000 (Lundqvist and Roman 2008: 230).

Scholars have also emphasized that there is a need to revise the meaning of women-friendliness in the context of diversity. Minority ethnic and immigrant women are marginalized in Sweden as in the other Nordic countries and elsewhere (Siim and Borchorts 2008, in Lister 2009). “Gender equality” has become the ethic and racialized marker of Swedishness (see Lister 2009; Carbin 2008; Scuzzarello 2008). As Ann Towns shows (2002), gender equality, paradoxically, has helped to produce one unifying national identity of the state of Sweden while, at the same time, creating divisions within the state. While (re)producing the image of Sweden as the champion of gender equality, this discourse has involved a hierarchical division between “gender-equal Swedes” and “gender-unequal immigrants”. Thereby, immigrants are constructed as the other in the gender-equal state of Sweden. This has involved a stigmatization of the category of immigrants, including immigrant women. In the next section I will centre upon welfare state restructurings and neo-liberal policies in the Swedish context.

6.1.4 Private solutions in the context of welfare state restructurings

In the Nordic countries, as in other European countries, neo-liberalism has grown in importance since the 1990s, emphasizing family and individual responsibility in care. The 1990s was a period of economic difficulties and unemployment problems in Sweden as well as in the other Nordic countries. Sweden reached an unemployment rate of 9.9% in 1996, but since then this percentage has diminished (Ellingsæter and Leira 2006: 9). In the context of increasing unemployment, immigrants faced a highly discriminatory labour market. At the beginning of the 1990s 70 per cent of immigrants were (formally) employed but by the end of the decade only 55 per cent were employed. Non-Nordic women faced the worst situation: only 43 per cent had jobs (Hobson 2003: 81). Governments reduced social benefits: lowering replacement rates, introducing waiting days for sickness benefits, shortening the duration of unemployment benefits, etc. (Esping-Andersen 1999: 80). In this period, the fertility rate dropped from 2.13 in 1990 to 1.54 in 2000, but has since then increased again (Ellingsæter and Leira 2006: 10).

The neo-liberal discourse gave legitimacy to the criticism of the Swedish model. The values of the Swedish welfare state were challenged, and a restructuring of social benefits and services was promoted. Pressures from internationalized finance and product markets, the revival of the ideology of the downscaling of welfare states and of labour market deregulation challenged this welfare state model (Platzer 2006: 214). As the sustainability of a universal and egalitarian welfare state was questioned, there was a process of individualization, flexibilization and diversification with an emphasis on consumers’ choice (Ellingsæter and Leira 2006: 3). There was a shift from emphasizing rights to underlining citizen’s obligations. Right-wing parties argued in favour of reducing state responsibilities by fomenting private initiatives and individual responsibility (Lister et al. 2007: 62-3). Moreover, researchers have linked the expansion of the domestic service market in Sweden in the 1990s to changes in the welfare state (Calleman 2007; Platzer 2007, 2006; Gavanas 2006; Öberg 1999). The relationship between the welfare state, domestic service and migration will be discussed later on in

this section. But first I will underline some of the aspects of the restructuring of the Swedish welfare state.

Public care services have gone through severe cutbacks leading to lower capacity, shortage of personnel and lower quality in health services, child care and elderly care. A Government Official Report from 2005 (SOU 2005) compares the developments within elderly care and child care, showing that while the needs for public childcare more often are met, elderly care needs are more and more seldom met. Cut-downs in the public sector have resulted in a less accessible elderly care and a rise of care provided by relatives.

Welfare state retrenchment has involved reduced child care financing and increased parental fees. The cuts have not resulted in a reduction of the number of children in public child care but in deterioration in the quality of care, particularly in relation to the staff/child ratio. The lower standard has led to an increase in private nursery schools and, at the same time, the increase in private nursery schools reduces the resources and quality of public childcare. When it comes to elderly care, both quality and the amount of care provided decreased, and families were increasingly expected to fill the gaps (Hobson 2003:80). The shifts imply that elderly care is more restricted to those in greatest need while child care, on the other hand, continues to be a universal right (Szebehely 1998: 278).

Sweden has come closer to other European countries' policies on elderly care with family and market solutions being more widespread. The number of the elderly receiving public elderly care has decreased since the 1980s. In 1980 62% of the population aged 80 or more received public elderly care, while in 2000 this percentage was 44. It is especially home help that has decreased; the percentage of the elderly 80 years old or more receiving home help decreased during this period from 34 to 21. Elderly care has come to concentrate more and more on the very frail elderly, while elderly who are considered to be less needy are left without public help. The decrease does not reflect a decline in the need for help among the elderly, and home help has declined even among the elderly with greater care needs.

The reduced home help does not mean that the municipalities have reduced legal responsibility. But it has been argued that the quality of the services has declined due to fewer personnel, shorter time for home help, and decreased help in domestic tasks such as cleaning. There have been some efforts to professionalize home helpers through formal training programs, though. Elderly care involves both care and domestic work and, yet, the elderly have increasingly had to turn to the market for services like cleaning, washing clothes and purchases. Fees have also augmented and some elderly have discarded home help because of economic reasons, particularly women with low pensions. Nonetheless, the increase in fees stopped due to the maximum fee reform in 2002 which also stipulates the minimum income care receivers must be left with. Children of care receivers are not obliged to contribute to the costs. The Family Act does not attribute care responsibilities to grown-up children or other relatives, but then, in practice, some municipalities do. Scholars emphasize a "refamilialization" in elderly care: family care has become more important. There are clear class divisions here, though; the elderly with low education rely more on family help while the elderly with higher education rely to a larger extent on market-provided services (Szebehely 2004: 176-80). Family care often means women's

care also in the Swedish context. Mainly daughters take care of their elderly parents, but generally they do not leave their paid employment to care for their elderly (ibid. 191).

Elderly care has gone through a process of privatization. The aim of exposing public services to private competition was stated in a parliamentary Act already in 1992 (Platzer 2006: 215). Private entities that provide publicly subsidized elderly care have become more and more common in Sweden since the 1990s. This is part of the so-called New Public Management which promotes market-inspired solutions for what have previously been public care services. In this context, the elderly are viewed as clients and care services are considered products (Szebehely 2004: 181). There is an increased focus on the freedom of choice between public and private service providers.

It has been pointed out that the working conditions within the sector are declining, and this affects women workers the most since women dominate in this work (Szebehely 2004: 183). In the 1990s the growing numbers of women reporting sick was taken as an indication of increased workload in the public sector due to cutbacks (Sundström 2003: 17). It can also be noted that in the Nordic countries there is a high percentage of migrants in care work, not in the private sector but public sector of health and social services (OECD 2004, in Martínez Buján 2007: 35).

Ellinor Platzer sets the discussion on domestic services in the context of the changing welfare state, pointing at how the combining of work and family life has been solved at different times in history, going from “private solutions” to “public responsibility”, and back again (Platzer 2006). The expansion of the domestic service market in Sweden in the 1990s happened in the context of the restructuring of the welfare state but also in a context of an increasing unemployment among migrant and low-educated women, and there was an important labour immigration from Eastern European countries (Platzer 2004: 10; Nyberg 1999: 45). Today, the Swedish state does not grant special work permits for migrant domestic workers through quotas or regularization policies as in other European countries (Apap 2002: 322). But historically there have been such exceptions in immigration policies for domestic workers. In the 1930s domestic work was the most common occupation among women in Sweden, mainly performed by young women moving from rural to urban areas. As the expansion of the welfare state offered other work opportunities for these women, the deficit in domestic workers became apparent. The Swedish state tried to resolve this deficit through exceptions in the immigration policies and no work permit was required for immigrant domestic workers between 1943 and 1972. But, due to the expansion of the welfare state, domestic work became more and more uncommon until finally becoming obsolete in the 1970–1980s (Calleman 2007). Then, as a consequence of the decline of the welfare state during the 1990s and the transfer of more care responsibilities back to the family, paid domestic work re-emerged in Swedish homes⁸⁰. The quality of public child care decreased and shorter schedules created gaps between day care and work schedules⁸¹

⁸⁰ Given Sweden’s tradition of extended public care provisions, domestic services have predominately been associated with housework and cleaning and not primarily with care work. However, domestic services have also recently been seen as a way of compensating for the shortcomings of the public care system, hence involving childminding and elderly care.

⁸¹ A way to attain cheap domestic service work in Sweden goes through the au-pair system. This system has expanded in Sweden since the mid 1980s. The system is based on the idea of cultural exchange but is rather a form importing cheap labour (Platzer 2002). Nevertheless, it is mainly high-income families that employ au-pairs as a complement to the publicly subsidized child care and for domestic work in general.

(Lister et. al 2007: 155). More importantly, the cutbacks in public home help influenced the demand for private domestic services among the elderly, particularly better-off pensioners. Some retired people who are not entitled to public care services need to buy services on the market and pay for them themselves. Moreover, the cost of public elderly care depends on the income and for a retired person with high pension it can be cheaper to buy services from the private market instead from the municipality (Platzer 2006: 218).

In the 2000s Sweden has come to form a part of the global care chains where cheap migrant labour is demanded by households with average or high income, which aspire to combine employment and family life (Gavanas 2006). Studies indicate that there is a large informal market of household services, which are increasingly demanded by and accessible to Swedish middle-class households (Gavanas 2006; Platzer 2003, Lister et al. 2007). With the entrance of Sweden into the European Union, workers from countries with high unemployment and low salaries have become increasingly available (Calleman 2007: 12). While neo-liberal discourses have legitimized a shift from emphasizing citizen's rights to highlighting citizen's obligations for some time now, the right-wing parties in government since 2006 have introduced reforms which involve restructuring social benefits and services, fomenting private initiatives and emphasizing individual responsibility.

6.2 Domestic service: gender inequality, maids and the reconciliation of work and family life

6.2.1 Policies surrounding domestic service

Domestic service has been a highly controversial issue in Sweden and it has been closely linked to the norms of gender and class equality. The issue of domestic service has historically been debated in terms of possibilities to combine work and family life. Improving the rights of domestic workers seemed not to be consistent with the requirements of “working mothers” with professional careers. Domestic workers were then not represented as mothers (Calleman 2007: 57). The famous Social Democrat and feminist Alva Myrdal made a connection between the low birth rates in Sweden in the 1930s and the lack of domestic workers. She focused on the needs of middle-class mothers and housewives rather than on the needs of domestic workers (Platzer 2006: 213; Öberg 1999: 174). The Social Democratic Party has been divided on this issue of domestic work since then; there has been a split between those advocating the interests of working mothers and those demanding improvements in the working conditions of domestic workers. The Swedish Trade Union Confederation *LO* historically showed very little interest in the issue of domestic workers and their demands. The women’s union of *LO* would also defend the position of “housewives” rather than domestic workers.

Mainly women were employed in domestic service, and in 1930 domestic work was the most common profession for women (Calleman 2007: 40). The long process of improving the rights of domestic workers can be related to the class and gender inequalities involved in the debate as well as the division between the cities and rural areas and between Swedes and immigrants (Öberg 1999: 183). Historically, domestic assistants (*hembiträden*) were situated outside of all collective negotiation and were separated from regular labour law. This implied that the working hours were not specified and when they started to regulate them it was by regulating spare time (Öberg 1999: 166-7, 184). Domestic work was considered so irregular and flexible that it was impossible to fix working hours (Platzer 2006: 212). In the 1920s and 30s domestic workers started to organize themselves around the questions of work schedules and equality with industrial workers, but their isolated work situation with long working hours put obstacles to activism (Calleman 2007: 24). Nevertheless, in 1944 all domestic workers, except the ones taking care of children, got the right to fixed working hours through the Act on home assistants (*hembidrådeslagen*) (Platzer 2006: 213). The reform was conceived as part of the pro-natal policies of the time (Calleman 2007: 16). In 1971, however, a new Act on domestic work was adopted (*lag om husligt arbete*) and it established rules on working hours in paid household work. Thereby, domestic workers were the last workers to get 8-hour working day in Sweden.

In the 1970s the public care sector was extended and work opportunities were created for many women. Those performing care and domestic work were employed in the public sector instead of private households, which implied better working conditions

compared to privately hired domestic workers (Platzer 2006: 213). This kind of employment entitled the workers to social benefits; they got colleagues and could enter the trade unions (Öberg 1999).

Domestic service emerged as a controversial policy issue at the beginning of the 1990s in relation to the proposal of introducing a tax credit for domestic services⁸². The debate has come to be called the “maid debate” (*pigdebatten*) and has been articulated as a matter of gender and class divisions (see also Kvist and Peterson 2010; Bowman and Cole 2009; Kvist et al. 2009; Gavanas 2006; Öberg 1999; Platzer 2004, 2006). At the time, the public sector had gone through cutbacks and women’s and immigrants’ unemployment was increasing. Development in the industrial sector had slowed down and the private services sector seemed to be significant for employment and growth in the future (Bowman and Cole 2009: 161).

Domestic work was discussed in terms of whether domestic services should be state-subsidized or not. The debates emerged as part of a process of attempting to change the economic policies in Sweden in the early 1990s, to make the labour market more efficient, lower the taxes and flexibilize the labour regulations (Platzer 2004: 105). More concretely, it was in 1993 that the debate started after an intervention by the economist and subsequently MP for the Moderate Party, Anne-Marie Pålsson⁸³. She proposed a tax credit for domestic services (*domestika tjänster*). Villy Bergström, at the time economist of the Swedish Trade Union Confederation *LO* and later on vice president of the central bank, criticized the idea by saying that he did not want Sweden to become a “maid society” (*pigsamhälle*). Through diffusion of this discussion in the media, the so-called “maid debate” had emerged (Öberg 1999: 191; Platzer 2004: 24).

Since 1994 the right-wing parties have presented on various occasions proposals to make domestic services tax-deductible. The committee of the Social Democratic Party and the women’s union of the same party were very influential in the debate and, hence, for a long time they prevented the measure from being adopted (Platzer 2004: 117). The Social Democratic Party in government from 1994 to 2006 rejected the proposals, together with the Left Party and the Green Party⁸⁴. Nonetheless, Government commissions were set up, in 1994 and 1997, to investigate the potential effects of tax credits and state subsidies for paid domestic work. Among the proposals to make domestic services tax-deductible there were variations with respect to the type of subvention/tax credit⁸⁵ and the groups seen as target groups (to receive tax credit mainly elderly and families with children, to work in domestic service mainly young people and immigrants). An Act on tax credits for domestic services would be adopted years later, in 2007 with the right-wing Alliance in government.

⁸² In my presentation of the development of the maid debate I draw especially upon Ellinor Platzer’s work (2004, 2007). She reconstructs the debate and the arguments of different state and non-state actors involved from the beginning of the maid debate until 2004.

⁸³ For the details of the proposal see Pålsson and Norman 1994.

⁸⁴ There were also some prominent Social Democrats who spoke in favour of a tax deduction for domestic services.

⁸⁵ The measures that were presented were service cheques, lower value added taxes and reduced employers’ contributions. The main proposals to lower the cost of domestic services were: a) tax deduction by the time of tax return and b) subsidy at the time of the payment of the services. The proposals considered services performed by companies or individuals or both (Platzer 2004: 105).

The right-wing government in power in 1994 decided to set up the first public investigation on the issue of domestic service, even though the parties in coalition held different views on the idea of subsidizing domestic services. The Government Official Report (SOU 1994: 43) proposed that households with adults who work at least part-time should be able to deduct from taxes the cost of employing someone for domestic work or “home-proximate services” (*hemnära tjänster*). Households with children would be able to deduct more than others. The state report considered that the tax measure would benefit women, especially highly educated women. The right-wing government lost the elections that year, the Social Democrats formed government and the investigation did not result in a Government bill.

Soon after that domestic services got attention in policy reports that mainly focused on other issues. A Government Official Report (SOU 1996:55) about the integration of immigrants was presented in 1996. This report was elaborated by a parliamentary immigrant commission set up for this purpose. Among other things, this report proposed to subsidize immigrants’ salaries, on the one hand, to increase the number of employees in the public sector and, on the other hand, to expand the market of household services, including care work. The proposal was criticized, both from within the commission and by other actors and especially by the Left Party and the Green Party. The Social Democratic government decided to appoint a commission to investigate the role of the service sector in the Swedish economy and society. The Directive stated that the commission should focus on the importance of services for employment and consumers’ welfare. It also stated that the proposals of the commission should not be about the employment of individuals in private households but, in any case, about provision of domestic services by companies and cooperatives.

The second Government Official Report would be presented in 1997 (SOU 1997:17). The Report proposed to abolish employers’ contributions and fees for the self-employed in work related to “household-proximate services” (*hushållsnära tjänster*). The report stated that the proposals could lead to a greater specialization, employment and welfare. An expansion of the service sector was considered to be the best alternative in order to balance the economic development. These services included all services that represented a substitute for domestic work, regardless of whether the work was performed in private households or outside home. A general objective was to increase efficiency and specialization through changes in the tax system and, thereby, to create more employment (Platzer 2004: 45). The report vaguely developed an idea about how elderly with low pensions could get increased possibilities to get home help. On the issue of gender equality it argued that it would probably not increase equality because, even though women would be able to cut down on domestic work, men would not participate more in this work. The tax measure related to household-proximate services was considered an expensive measure and the Commission’s report did not turn into a Government bill. However, one aspect went further to the parliament: the tax credit for home improvement: reparations, reconstructions and extensions of the home, work associated with construction and masculine jobs including repair, rebuilding and extensions (*ROT-avdrag: reparationer, ombyggnader och tillbyggnader*). This became a polemic issue as well since the tax credit for the female-dominated sector of domestic work, a policy proposal called RUT including cleaning, maintenance and washing (*RUT*

avdrag: regöring, underhåll och tvätt), was rejected⁸⁶. A year later, a report on policies for the three biggest Swedish cities (SOU 1998: 25) suggested that subsidizing domestic services might improve entrepreneurship in the marginal parts of the cities. However, the Social Democratic Party in government remained sceptical about such a policy.

Since 2002 all the right-wing parties (the Moderate Party, the Liberal Party, the Centre Party, and the Christian Democratic Party) have agreed on a joint proposal to introduce tax credits for domestic service. They promised to introduce the reform if they were elected to government. The right-wing parties proposed a tax credit of 50% of the working costs for “home-proximate services” (*hemnära tjänster*), which were defined as services performed in the “home” or in the property of the home. This policy aimed to change the labour market, with increased employment, economic growth and more resources for the public sector. The households would get greater possibilities to choose between paid and unpaid work. The parties also wanted to create possibilities to choose between publicly and privately provided care, so that women and men’s reconciling of employment and parenthood would be facilitated. The proposal was rejected by the left-wing parties.

The Swedish Trade Union Confederation *LO* was influential in the debate and generally maintained a negative position towards the proposal of tax credits for domestic service (Platzer 2004: 25). Nevertheless, in 2000 a report by the *LO* stated that future employment would be found in the private service sector. Some problems with this tendency were pointed out (*LO* 2000). Due to the high unemployment, the employers in this sector could disregard rules on working conditions. The salaries were generally lower than in other sectors and the black labour market was extensive. The tax credits for domestic services were criticized on the basis that they would rather redistribute work and consumption than create more employment. The public sector should be prioritized rather than introducing tax credits for domestic services. Subsidies were still regarded as a solution in the context of unemployment and redistribution policies, and the ROT-credit for home improvement (reparations, reconstructions and extensions of the home) was considered a good measure related to the negative conjuncture in the construction business. Subsidies were also considered good if they would reorient black work towards the regular labour market, but this relation was not considered convincing. *LO* suggested tax credits for domestic work in the homes of elderly performed by principally long-term unemployed people with low education. The purpose was to create “real” work opportunities with salaries according to the lowest level on the labour market. Importantly, the report highlighted the ageing of the population, and that the fewer hours of home help provided by the municipalities implied worse services for the elderly. Following from this, those who could afford it paid for domestic services on the market and those who could not afford it relied on the family and relatives. *LO* proposed a system of domestic services that could complement the home help provided by the municipalities, including cleaning, errands, shopping, cooking, ironing, etc. The work would be organized by cooperative companies. The Social Democratic Party decided to turn down the proposal from *LO* on subsidies for domestic services for the elderly with the argument that it would have a distorting effect on the labour market.

⁸⁶ Rut is also a Swedish female name, which reinforces the associations of the RUT deduction with women’s work.

The tax credit for domestic services was one of the most notable proposals during the right-wing Alliance's elections campaign in 2006. One of the most important arguments in favour of this reform concerned gender equality and the problems of combining work and family life. Before the parliament adopted the Government bill on tax credit for domestic services, key actors and institutions were consulted on the issue. The *Gender Equality Ombudsman* argued against the policy on the basis that it did not aim to change gendered power relations and that gender equality should involve increasing the responsibility of men in care and domestic work. The proposal was argued to reinforce gender inequality in the long run. Given the class divisions in society, many people would not be able to afford the services and the policy would privilege already well-off households, while single mothers would most likely not use the tax credit. According to the Ombudsman, there was a risk of creating a low-paid female-dominated work force. The aim of the policy to increase the time spent in paid work was criticized from the point of view that this would imply parents spending less time with their children and, hence, it was against children's best interests. Also the Swedish Trade Union Confederation *LO* was sceptical, emphasizing the problem of privileging upper-class households. *LO* articulated doubts about whether tax credits for domestic services would imply a shift from care work for all in the public sector to domestic work for well-off households in the private sector. Nevertheless, other state actors as well as private sector actors expressed a positive view of the policy (Finansdepartementet 2006).

An Act on tax credits for domestic services was finally adopted in 2007 after the right-wing Alliance had formed a government in 2006. Domestic services became tax-deductible from the 1st of July 2007, a tax reduction equivalent to 50% of the cost of domestic services. On the eve of the elections in 2010 the issue emerged again in the debates since the Social Democratic Party, the Left Party and the Green Party promised to derogate the Act on tax credit for domestic services. Nonetheless, the right-wing Alliance won the elections again.

The maid debate engaged the parliament, political parties, trade unions, employers' organizations, feminists and the media. The globalized labour market got some attention in the media, with a focus on the fact that some immigrant women were working in Sweden without basic workers' rights. Moreover, in 2006 two of the Ministers of the new right-wing government were forced to resign when the media revealed that they had employed domestic workers and nannies from the underground market (Bowman and Cole 2009: 158). The feminist movement debated the issue in relation to the concept of sisterhood. Is it right that some women are released from domestic work while other women have to clean in both their own home and other people's home, considering that the work is attributed low status and is badly remunerated? Also, if women continue doing domestic work in their own *and* other people's homes; how can we then expect to change the idea that it is "women's work" (Öberg 1999: 162)? Feminists were divided on the issue. On the one hand, Liberal feminists emphasized women's rights to participate in the labour market on equal terms with men. On the other hand, Social Democratic and socialist feminists underlined the problems of gender, class and ethnic inequalities. In that sense, the dividing lines cut across the traditional right-left divide in Swedish politics (Kvist, Carbin and Harjunen 2009). However, this does not mean that political representatives have always followed their party's opinion; for instance, there have been Social Democratic women who have argued in favour of a tax credit. The voices of

domestic workers themselves or organizations representing them have been absent in the debate (Bowman and Cole 2009; Calleman 2007; Gavanas 2007; de los Reyes and Mulinari 2005). The silence can to some extent be understood in terms of domestic workers' lack of citizenship rights (Bowman and Cole 2009: 179). In contrast, companies that employ domestic workers have been rather visible in the debate.

Researchers have emphasized the importance of the gender equality discourse in framing domestic service in Sweden. Furthermore, the contentiousness of this debate has often been explained with reference to divisions related to gender and class. The debate has raised controversial questions: Does paid domestic work increase or decrease class differences and gender inequality? How does it influence employment patterns? Does it increase the level of welfare (Öberg 1999: 164)?

I will focus on how the issue of domestic service has been articulated as a policy problem of gender (in)equality since the beginning of the maid debate in the mid 1990s. As I analyze the discourse articulated by the state, I have selected policy reports, parliamentary debates, Acts and Government bills. The analysis is organized by first looking at the policy reports, Government Official Investigations (SOU), presented at the beginning of the maid debate, in 1994 and in 1997. Secondly, I analyze the parliamentary debates surrounding the issue of domestic services in the period of 1995-2006, when the Social Democratic Party was in government and the proposals to introduce a subsidy/tax credit for domestic service came from the parties in the opposition. Thirdly, I analyze the Government bill, the parliamentary debate and the Act on tax credit for domestic services adopted in 2007 with the new right-wing government.

6.2.2 Estimated activity? The first government report 1994

The “maid debate” emerged in 1993 after a proposal to subsidize domestic services. The right-wing government in power set up a public investigation to probe the potential effects of such a policy. This Government Official Report (SOU 1994: 43) was called *Estimated activity – on the importance of taxes for the private service sector* and it proposed that adults who work at least part-time should be granted the right to a tax credit for employing someone for domestic work. Households with children would be able to deduct more than others since families with children had the greatest need for help.

The title “Estimated activity” indicated that the report would deal with the value of domestic work, but it was about valuing the work in economic terms not referring to the sexual division of labour or why domestic work has been attributed low social value. The report considered it a problem that unpaid domestic work was not included in economic calculations, but recognized the difficulties involved in calculating the value of this work. The rational individual was the point of departure in this report; the individual knows best what his or her preferences are and the demand for domestic services could be explained by rational calculations in terms of distribution of paid and unpaid work between family members. Subsidized domestic services would facilitate individuals to independently decide about the distribution of work between home and market. According to the report such a policy would increase the level of welfare. The report considered it a good thing to turn unpaid work into paid work, which had already happened with a great part of child

care and elderly care in Sweden. There was still room to turn more unpaid work in the home into paid work, through supporting the private domestic service sector.

A policy subsidizing domestic services would help to mitigate several problems. Unemployment was a central problem and the high taxes on work were said to make it more advantageous to be unemployed, thanks to the social benefits, than to be employed. The tax credit would have important effects on employment, mainly creating jobs for women. Also, the report argued in favour of subsidizing domestic services in terms of comparative advantage; through turning unpaid work in the home into paid work in the labour market or studies, women would improve their professional situation and their contribution to the total production. A tax reduction for domestic services would make it possible for “white” services to compete with “black”⁸⁷ services in the informal sector. According to the report, there would be a significant demand for formal domestic services, mainly cleaning and child care, if the services were cheaper.

The report set out to apply “cold economic calculation” on an issue that had been “emotionally charged” (SOU 1994: 43, 7). Hence, the report constructed economic analysis, focusing on individuals’ maximizing benefits through rational calculation and the creation of employment, as value-free in contrast to the value-charged, implicitly irrational and biased, debates.

6.2.3 Gender equality – for whom? The second government report 1997

The Government Official Report SOU 1997:17, issued by the Social Democratic government, proposed to abolish employers’ contributions and fees for the self-employed in work related to “household-proximate services”. These services included all services that represent a substitute for domestic work, independently of whether the work is performed in the home or outside home. A general objective of the commission’s report was to increase efficiency and specialization through changes in the tax system and, thereby, to create more employment. The integration of the unemployed in the labour market was a primary goal and the policy was seen as part of a wider strategy to decrease unemployment.

In contrast to the earlier report, this report explored the ways in which subsidizing domestic services might influence different groups of women. Firstly, it focused on gender equality in professional life for employers of domestic workers. The report argued that it could be seen as positive for women’s professional life to buy domestic services and, thereby, be able to increase the amount of paid work and advance within their professions. It was highlighted that it is not economically efficient for highly educated women to spend so much time in unpaid work. Additionally, with affordable domestic services women now working part-time could increase their working time. Secondly, gender equality in the home of employers of domestic workers was considered. Overall, given that women do most of the unpaid work, domestic services would mainly free women from this work. But the report emphasized that the answer depended on if we

⁸⁷ In Swedish the words *svart* (black) and *vit* (white) are used to refer to formal and informal labour markets. This usage does not have any racial undertones and is common in official documents (Bowman and Cole 2009: 168).

define equality as a) men and women spending the same amount of time in housework or b) men spending more time in housework. Class divisions, in terms of the division between high- and low-income households, were considered crucial in order to understand the effects of externalizing domestic services. On the one hand, households with average or high incomes would be able to afford to consume a lot of domestic services and, therefore, they would have great possibilities of increasing gender equality in the home. On the other hand, in households that could not afford to significantly increase their consumption of domestic services gender equality would not increase. In contrast, the report also underlined the problem that subsidizing domestic services may imply not expecting an increase of men's time in housework and childcare, particularly in high-income families:

An increased consumption of market-produced household-proximate service might result in fortifying the gender inequality that exists today in many households and contribute to passing it on to coming generations. (SOU 1997: 17)

The report also asked: who would most likely perform domestic services? And what would be the effect on these workers in terms of gender equality? Women with immigrant background and/or low education who have been working in office work, commerce and care work formed the category most likely to take this kind of jobs. Even though domestic service might give an income to certain groups that before were located outside of the labour market, there would be no increase in gender equality for domestic workers. A problem, according to the report, was the lack of professional development in such work. Hence, a policy of tax credits needed to be accompanied by a parallel stimulation of education and capacity building.

This report analyzed the relationship between gender equality, tax reductions for domestic services, and the welfare state (Regnér 1997). The analysis gave rise to key questions: What should be included as part of the general welfare state policy? Should, for instance, cleaning and cooking for the elderly be part of public welfare provision? To what extent would the subsidizing of private domestic service replace public care and domestic work services? Will private services replace or complement public services? What would be the gendered effects of turning public services into private services? The report indicated that domestic service was linked to central questions for the future: the social organization of care and domestic work and the negotiation of boundaries between the private and public.

6.3 The “maid debate” in the Swedish parliament

Tax credits for domestic services have been widely debated in Sweden since the mid 1990s and the question appeared in the parliamentary debates related to diverse issues and policy problems such as gender inequality, unemployment, the combining of work and family life, welfare provision for the elderly, migration and integration. The analysis in the following sections focuses on the so-called “maid debate” as articulated in parliamentary debates from 1995 to 2006. After that, I will analyze more specifically the

debates surrounding the adoption of the new policy on tax credits for domestic service. The analysis shows how domestic service, a marginal problem in Spain, has been represented as a controversial gender (in)equality issue. The maid debate deals with the three issues in dispute in the Spanish case study: the reconciliation of work and family life, elderly care and domestic workers' rights. It encompasses different and contesting representations of the problem of gender inequality, mainly linked to the intersection of gender and class. The maid debate also reveals the negotiation and legitimation of the boundaries of the welfare state.

The presentation is organized according to different problem representations. Firstly, I analyze the different accounts of the "maid-problem" as a gender inequality problem. Secondly, I examine the representations of the problem of combining work and family life and the underlying norm of paid work. Thirdly, I scrutinize the redrawing of the boundaries of the welfare state and the legitimation of the welfare state, from emphasizing "women-friendliness" to highlighting consumer "choice".

6.3.1 The "maid" problem

In the parliamentary debates the notion of "maid" was recurrent but controversial and there were rather clear-cut divisions between the left-wing parties (Social Democratic Party, the Left Party and the Green Party) and the right-wing parties (the Moderate Party, the Liberal Party, the Centre Party, and the Christian Democratic Party). The idea of fomenting the existence of maids, by means of a tax credit for domestic service, was considered an antiquated standpoint by the Social Democrats and the Left Party. The maid problem was linked to categories of gender and class and, to a lesser extent, ethnicity and migration. From the very beginning of the debate, one of the ways the problem was represented by the left-wing MPs was through the question: who is going to be the maid of the maid? Or: whose daughters do we expect to take maid jobs?

You only need to ask the question of who should be the maid of the maid. If one has any morals and honour in the body and does not want to worsen the class society that we are approaching, I think the answer is very clear. We should not have any new maids (Gudrun Schyman, leader of the Left Party, Riskdagens protokoll 1995/96: 76, 27 March).

The creation of maid work would lead to strengthening class divisions in Swedish society. The MPs argued that one did not need a lot of imagination to understand that most of these workers would be working class women. That the working class was expected to serve in well-off households was articulated as a problem. The idea of working-class women performing domestic services was seen as contributing to greater gender and class inequalities. At the same time, for class reasons the maid would not be able to use the right to tax credit for domestic service; it would be well-off families that could afford such expenses. Likewise, the idea that migrant women should perform domestic work in the homes of Swedes with high income ("like us") was rejected. Migrant women would most probably be those performing this kind of low-paid work, which would imply increasing segregation and divisions in society. This was represented

as an outdated way of thinking. At the centre of the problem representation was the norm of sharing care and domestic work between women and men. Domestic service would mean that, rather than facing the gender conflict about distribution of care and domestic work, a “third person” would do the work: the maid. This would reproduce the sexual division of labour since the maid most likely would be a woman, and men would not be required to take responsibility for home and children.

In contrast, the very notion of maids was seen as obsolete by right-wing MPs. They argued that the concept of maids was a problem in itself, because it linked domestic workers of today to maids of old times and their negative associations with old values and an oppressive past:

The problem... is that in the government there are Ministers that still see home help services the way they were represented by the home assistants we can see in the bad (“*pilsner*”) movies from the time between the world wars, where they come in with starched aprons curtsying the masters. Wake up...! We live in the 21st century, where modern families and pensioners do not get the home help they need and deserve (Mats Odell, Christian Democratic Party, Riskdagens protokoll 1997/98: 71, 20 February).

Hence, domestic service was represented as something totally different today, when “modern” people require domestic service to manage combining work and family life.

I think the government has some kind of nineteenth-century image on the retina of the maid in a black dress and white apron in a flat in upper Östermalm [luxurious part of Stockholm]. I just want to inform the Minister that time has past since then. Today it is about people who have troubles making all parts of life fit together (Sven Brus, Christian Democratic Party, Riskdagens protokoll 2001/02: 113, 27 May).

When the right-wing parties used arguments surrounding class, the problem was represented from the point of view that few people could afford domestic services in Sweden. Why should only rich people have the possibility to buy domestic services? Their answer to this problem was to make domestic services accessible for all through subsidizing them. It was also emphasized that the “real” maid problem was about those already existing domestic workers in the informal sector who do not have social rights or even lack work permits. Due to the black market for domestic services, young women from Eastern Europe come to Sweden to work and employers do not pay taxes and Social Security contributions for them.

The controversy about the concept of maids was closely linked to the value attributed to domestic work. All MPs argued that they valued this work highly, but held contradictory views on what the implication of this position was. From the perspective of left-wing voices, everyone should do their own “dirty work”. Left-wing MPs attempted to promote domestic work as “fun”, when referring to their own habits of cleaning their home. In contrast, externalizing domestic work to a third person, a maid, meant devaluing the time of the maid.

There lies a valuation in that my time outside home is so much more important than the time of the person that comes into my home (Camilla Sköld Jansson, Left Party, Riskdagens protokoll 1999/2000: 41, 7 December).

From this point of view, the notion of the “maid” was considered to say more about the employer than the worker; the employer considers his/her time too important to do this kind of work and so they buy the services. This view has also appeared within the literature on global care chains (Anderson 2000). Why should domestic workers do the work others do not want? Among the left-wing MPs domestic work was seen as unskilled, referring mainly to cleaning work and detached from care. At the same time, similar work performed within the public sector was attributed great value; domestic work performed in the public sector, like home help for the elderly, was seen as associated with more skilled work, given the link to care work.

The positive value of paid domestic work was mainly emphasized by the right-wing parties. They considered the left-wing MPs as showing disdain for this kind of work; by referring to maids they were saying that this work was not good enough. This negative view on the work was, in turn, insulting and discriminating the group of people prepared to do this work. A representative of the Liberal Party even exclaimed: “I hate the word maids” (Helena Bargholtz, Riskdagens protokoll 1008/1999: 42, 20 January). Work performed in private homes should be considered of equal worth to similar work in the public sphere. Some MPs referred to their own work experience to underline the value of care and domestic work, saying that they had cleaned as home helpers without feeling devalued. The value of domestic work was also represented as linked to the importance of facilitating daily life for double-working families and pensioners, promoting their “quality of life”. Paid domestic work was argued to be as good as any job. Domestic workers were represented as a work category with a “proud” professional identity, and with special competences. An MP from the Liberal Party confessed that she personally valued her own domestic worker because she was a skilled cleaner -and an “angel”:

I promise you, that when Harriet comes home to us and cleans she is loved by the whole family. She is loved because we value her work infinitely, then I can do something else that I am better at. Harriet is better than me at cleaning. I promise: She is an angel, and she is clearly appreciated (Tina Acketoft, Liberal Party, Riskdagens protokoll 2005/06: 49, 12 December).

The problem of domestic service was thereby individualized. Additionally, the individual domestic worker was said to be highly valued. But what does that mean? That she was valued in terms of good working conditions? Or considering her “one of the family”? When it comes to the question whether everyone should do their own “dirty work”, the right-wing parties supported no such morals. But some right-wing MPs added that domestic work was boring and that they preferred doing other things with their time.

Right-wing MPs argued that the left-wing parties considered female work of lower value than male work, referring to the already adopted policy of tax credits for the “masculine” work of “home improvement”. Why was it acceptable to support male employment through tax credits for home improvement when it was not accepted to support female employment through tax credits for domestic service? To favour male workers and not women workers was hence put forward as a problem. While people

cannot afford white domestic services and, thus, buy domestic services in the informal market this disfavours women. From this the conclusion was that “women’s work” was not a priority⁸⁸. Furthermore, the Christian Democratic Party represented the division between women’s work and men’s work as natural by arguing that women and men have different talents, linked to the work they perform. From this point of view, women and men’s work were considered different and complementary, but “equal in value”.

6.3.2 The problem of combining work and family

A central idea in the Swedish welfare state model is that people should be able to combine paid work with having a family, both men and women, and nobody should have to choose between work and family. The debate on domestic services was articulated as closely related to the problem of combining work and family life, by all the political parties. They widely agreed that gender equality policies have to make it possible for men and women to combine work, family and private life. The problem of sharing care and domestic work between women and men was also highlighted by all actors, given the fact that women continue to be the main persons in charge of children, home, cleaning, care for the elderly, etc., and men do not participate enough in care for children and domestic work. The heterosexual couple with children appeared most often as the norm: care and household work should be a shared responsibility of a woman and a man. While the MPs shared these views on the centrality of the problem of combining work and family life, there were divergent views on how to solve that problem.

The right-wing MPs articulated a vision of gender equality as equal participation in the labour market. Gender equality policies must aim to facilitate women and men’s combining of work and family. From this perspective, the increased access of families to domestic workers was said to improve gender equality since women would be able to participate in the labour market as men do. In other words, an extended market of domestic services would be the solution for women because they would be able to work as much as men and, at the same time, manage their “life-puzzle”. Women feel responsible for the care of children and this affects their possibilities of professional careers, but with domestic service they would compete in equal conditions, meaning that domestic service should be made more accessible. The resistance to developing the domestic service sector in Sweden was seen as a problem in the advancement towards gender equality.

I see it as a paradox that there is such a strong resistance in our country to say yes to a service sector that takes care of the tasks women traditionally have done - without pay and untaxed- in the home. The development of that sector is a pure gender equality issue so that the family will manage the life-puzzle. That especially applies if one thinks that women should have the same chance to be out on the labour market as men have (Magdalena Anderson, Moderate Party, Riksdagens protokoll 2003/04, 25 November).

⁸⁸ According to the Social Democratic government, the tax credit for home improvement was motivated by the very high unemployment rates in construction. There was no such unemployment in domestic service.

An important goal that was emphasized from the right-wing MPs was to have more women on top positions in society. Domestic services would enable women to make careers, to be among the top positions in the business world. Since women take most of the responsibility for home and children, career opportunities are limited; women's double work hinders their advancement in their professions; they cannot compete with men.

In our unequal society women are still the ones who take most of the work burden and responsibility of home and family. Everybody says it shouldn't be like that and it should be gender equal. But I think we have to be clear on that it is not. Our proposal related to domestic services could imply greater possibilities for career women to endeavour in their professional life (Elver Jonsson, Liberal Party, Riskdagens protokoll 2001/02:81, 13 March).

Domestic services would increase the quality of life of "normal" (middle-class) families where both (i.e., the man and the woman) are double working, trapped between professional and work expectations and requirements, on the one hand, and the needs of the family and the children, on the other. Domestic service was indeed represented as the cure for many problems; it can solve health problems, conflicts between couples, and avoid divorce. The problem of the life-puzzle referred mainly to the difficulties of combining work and family of parents with small children. Working mothers were the main subject in this problem representation.

Surely the real problem is that there are too many, especially young people, that have a tough time managing their life-puzzle. You have children. You have work. You have to take [the children] to the nursery school. There is school. You have to cook. You have to clean and do the dishes. If you are also supposed to have a career and create a base for a good work life in the future then it gets really tough. Then it is not easy. Then maybe both love and warmth fade away sometimes. In the midst of everything that happens and all the requirements you do not have the energy anymore. We know that it is not always the work situation that results in that women get exhausted. It is the double work, meaning that one works more hours in the home than men do. In order to mitigate that unbalance somehow I think that it would be reasonable to buy service in the home. If the taxes are reduced on domestic services... you can manage this in a very different way (Magdalena Anderson, Moderate Party, Riksdagens protokoll 2003/04, 25 November).

Another aspect was added to the problem representation: combining children, family, work and personal life leads to health problems. Right-wing MPs linked the high numbers of long-term sick leaves to the problem of combining work and family life and the solution of domestic services. Many double-working women get sick and especially working mothers lead stressful lives. Too many women get "burnt out" and are on a sick leave for a long time. Time is not enough. Due to the overload of work in the home, many people cannot contribute fully at the work place. These kinds of health problems were represented as "a new kind of problem" caused by the stressful reconciliation of family and work, were and related to economic growth and production. When the

combining of work and family life becomes too difficult people are no longer productive for society:

It is a question about being able to cope with our existence, to be able to have a well-functioning work and to be a resource for society. Today we are not. We are not able to manage the life-puzzle (Annelie Enochson, Christian Democratic Party, Riskdagens protokoll 2002/03: 84, 3rd of April).

State support for domestic services would facilitate the combining of work and family; the life-puzzle would work better, women would perform better at the work place, have a career and not get sick. "Single mothers" appeared as a category within this problem representation. Single mothers had most problems to manage combining work, care and domestic work. They were represented as a group with many health problems and increasing the accessibility of domestic services would favour single mothers. The right-wing MPs used the category of class to argue in favour of domestic services "for all". Why should only upper-class families be able to buy domestic services? Why should only women with high incomes be able to liberate themselves from domestic work? The idea that "everyone" should have access to domestic service was put forward. Why shouldn't normal people like nurses or school teachers be able to do the same? With a tax credit, also those with lower salaries could afford these services sometimes.

The left-wing MPs also considered the problem of combining work and family of families with small children as important, but they emphasized that parents are able to combine work and family with the help of public child care and flexible parental leaves. They also argued, especially at the beginning of this policy debate, that reduced working hours for all would be a better way of facilitating the combining of work, family and free time. A policy of reduced working day would take men's participation in the family and responsibility for care and domestic work as a norm. State support for domestic services did not challenge power structures. The central problem was unequal gendered power relations (*könsmaktsordningen*). Thus, tax credits for domestic service would perpetuate gender roles, accepting that domestic work is performed by women and not men. Gender equality policy should be about sharing housework between women and men and not about redistributing this work between different groups of women. With a tax credit some women would make careers while others would work double in their own homes and in the homes of their well-off employees. The domestic worker would be a woman, reproducing domestic work as women's work. Supporting the externalization of domestic work would mean avoiding the gender conflict in the families and men would get off the hook. We accept then that men do not have to take responsibility in the home, and this would reproduce masculine structures in work life. The persistence of the assumption of the male breadwinner was represented as a problem; the historical norm of the male breadwinner and female caretaker/homemaker has not entirely disappeared from Swedish society:

One of the big problems, which also implies a great weakness in gender equality, is the basic assumption of the nuclear family, in which the man is the main provider and the woman is a complementary provider and just has to contribute with pocket money to the family (Camilla Sköld, Left Party, Riskdagens protokoll 2005/06:12, 11 May 2006).

The tax credit for domestic work was seen as bad for gender equality because it lacked a power perspective. Rather than focusing on the real problem, men's lack of engagement in unpaid work, this policy would solve the problem by externalizing the work to a third person who would do the work for well-off families. Transferring the responsibility of care and domestic work to home assistants or nannies would not solve the problem but create a bigger low-wage female labour force. Left wing MPs emphasized the norm of sharing care and housework between women and men instead of redistributing this work between different groups of women along class and ethnic divisions. Well-off families had always demanded these services, but they could also afford to pay them, so why should the state sponsor their domestic services? Furthermore, it would not be fair to let women of the upper class buy their freedom from conflict with their husbands. The class division between employers and employees was highlighted: women with higher income and education would make careers and working-class women would clean homes. Maybe this policy would be good for upper-class women, but it would be bad for working-class women. Whereas many women have problems with the puzzle of everyday life, the left-wing MPs emphasized that most women would not be able to use the services, even with a tax credit:

It is not easy with the puzzle of taking (the kids) to the nursery school, having home-cooked meals, while working and feeling that you can fulfil yourself and then being fun Friday evening with your husband. It is not easy to make things fit together. I meet many women who have these problems. The problem is that the women I meet will not have one crown [approximately 0.10 Euros] left to buy those domestic services (Veronica Palm, Social Democratic Party, Riksdagens protokoll 2006/07: 27, 24 November).

Working-class women would not be able to afford the services even with a tax credit. Moreover, with a tax credit for domestic services working-class women and single mothers would have to pay for the luxuries of well-off dual earner families with children. Solutions should be oriented towards supporting the whole population, irrespective of whether they are well-off or not. When single mothers appeared as a category in the debate, however, it became clear that the argument of the left-wing MPs, that men should do their share, was based on the assumption of the heterosexual dual earner family.

6.3.3 The ethics of paid work

Overall, employment was put forward as a strong norm and a certain work ethic was generated within the policy debate. The key to gender equality was women and men's equal participation in the labour market. Economic independence was articulated as a fundamental part of gender equality since women should maintain themselves through work to be able to live on their own salaries. Employment was also considered the key to integration of immigrants.

The political parties that had a positive attitude towards a tax credit for domestic services emphasized the good effects on the economy and employment that such a policy would have. A Christian Democratic MP underlined that all work improved welfare and

growth, also domestic service. It was suggested that the tax credit was indeed a question of economic growth, but with effects on gender equality. The tax credit would lead to a creation of many new work opportunities, new companies would emerge in the sector, informal work would turn into formal work and people would spend more time in paid work while sick leaves would decrease.

Unemployment would diminish. There would be extremely many new jobs. The experience of the Finnish experiment indicates that that is the case. The costs of sick leaves would decrease... it is not unusual that young parents get sick-listed because they are totally exhausted due to the pressure that work together with family life and children puts on them. But maybe a more important point is that black work would become white (Anne Marie Pålsson, Moderate Party, Riksdagens protokoll 2003/04: 98, 20 April).

Employment was not only a necessary way to ensure economic independence but also an essential part of people's identity and self-respect. The value of "being a worker" was put forward. Women's employment was hence not only a necessary way to ensure economic independence but also an essential part of their identity. Creating more employment would lead to more people "feeling proud of going to work", including domestic workers. Both women and men should work more in paid work and domestic service would facilitate people to spend more time at work. It was therefore important to turn women's unpaid work into paid work. Since the domestic service sector is a feminine sector where women workers dominate, state support for domestic service would imply creating more job opportunities for women. The hope was that more women would start their own domestic service companies as they were already doing in the sector of privatized care. The right-wing parties considered it to be a problem that current domestic workers in the submerged economy have no job security and no work-related rights and benefits and they argued that this would change with their proposal. By means of creating formal employment and replacing "black work", the policy would improve the rights of domestic workers and, hence, the tax credit would promote gender equality also for domestic workers, not only for the employers of these workers.

What is more, the tax credit was argued to create work opportunities for specific categories of women; women with low education, young women and, most importantly, immigrant women. Domestic service was represented as a great opportunity for immigrant women to enter the Swedish labour market. Immigrant women would get their first chance to have a real job and a salary. Paid domestic work would represent their "first real chance to get into the homes of Swedish families. Integration...comes with it" (Catharina Elmsäter-Svärd, Moderate Party, Riskdagens protokoll 2003/04: 98, 20 April). In other words, domestic service would be the key to immigrants' integration into Swedish society.

The left-wing parties shared the norm of employment as the key to gender equality and they emphasized that it was also the key to class equality. But they were wary of the low-paid and low-skilled feminized work sector that would be supported through a tax credit for domestic services. They criticized the idea of promoting the insertion of migrant women in this specific sector because this would increase labour market segregation reinforcing inequalities related to gender and ethnic background. They frequently returned to the question: whose daughters should be brought up to do domestic

work? In the right-wing discourse problems of structural inequalities, segregation, discrimination and exploitation in formal labour markets and particularly in paid domestic work were ignored. At the same time, the lack of rights of domestic workers in the existing submerged economy were often overlooked among left-wing voices when they emphasized that women and men should share this work. The domestic worker emerged as an ambiguous subject position, on the one hand related to all-encompassing structural exploitation, and on the other related to the imposition of the role of the proud worker and entrepreneur. This will be discussed further in the section on the adoption of the new policy.

6.3.4 Legitimizing the welfare state: women-friendliness and free choice

In the parliamentary debates the MPs all agreed that in Sweden “we have come a long way in gender equality”. Swedish women and men were said to agree on the importance of gender equality. Sweden’s identity as one of the most gender-equal countries (if not the most) was confirmed by all the political parties.

The women-friendly welfare state, however, was emphasized mainly by the Social Democratic Party and the Left Party. Through family and social policy, women can combine work and family. The Swedish welfare state was contrasted with “Europe” where women have to choose between work and children.

We see that they are not so successful with this in Europe. We women have an incredibly strong position today in Swedish society. A lot of this is linked to having a functioning child care, we do not have to confront the choice that many women in Europe have to face, namely the choice between work and children. We have the possibility to do this combination (Berit Andnor, Minister of Child and Family Affairs, Social Democratic Party, Riksdagens protokoll 2003/04, 25 November).

The Minister of Gender Equality of the Social Democratic government referred to the Swedish welfare state model to explain why Sweden is “the best at gender equality”:

A jointly financed public sector has created possibilities for women and men to combine work and a proper maintenance with family. That constitutes the big difference between the Nordic model and the models that still prevail in Southern Europe and elsewhere... Publicly financed child and elderly care is a precondition for women to be able to combine work and family life (Jens Orback, Minister of Gender Equality, Social Democratic Party Parliamentary Debate 2005/06:121, 11 May 2006).

This women-friendly welfare state was represented as crucial for women also from the point of view that many women were employed in the public sector. The welfare state was seen as facilitating women’s high employment rates, both by means of job opportunities *and* by means of liberating women from care and domestic work in the home. Sex segregation in the labour market was, indeed, a problem, but the Social Democrats argued that this was a result of a positive shift, turning women’s unpaid work

into paid work in the public sector. At the same time it was recognized that welfare state retrenchment affected women in particular since women in the public sector suffer from worsened working conditions and low salaries. From this perspective, the tax credit for domestic services was articulated as a bad reform for the Swedish welfare state and, thereby, also for women, given that it would imply taking resources from the state and giving them to middle/upper-class families, instead of reinforcing universal welfare state services like child care and elderly care⁸⁹.

The boundaries of the welfare state were negotiated particularly in the issue of elderly care. The political parties appeared to agree that, due to the cutback in the welfare state, many elderly do not get the help they need. But again the left- and right-wing parties had divergent ideas on what to do about that. The right-wing MPs put an emphasis on market solutions, saying that the elderly should buy the services they need with the help of a tax credit for domestic services. Subsidized domestic service would help the elderly who do not qualify for public home help and increase their quality of life and sense of security. The elderly often live far away from their grown-up children who cannot take care of them so much. To increase their possibilities to buy domestic services would facilitate their everyday life and, additionally, it would alleviate the pressure on the municipality and, hence, the welfare state.

The critics argued that state-subsidized domestic service implies a privatization of welfare and welfare only for well-off families. Given the problems in public home help, the old and sick do not get the help they need, and it would not be right to spend the money on people who are well and fit. While high-income families could afford to pay for domestic services on the market, unpaid family care would increase among those with lower incomes. This would involve greater class inequalities between women. The Left Party emphasized the need for more debates surrounding the social organization of elderly care, emphasizing the need to return to a good public system of services and promoting a more generous home help for the elderly that also include domestic tasks like cleaning, etc.

There has been a certain shift away from the emphasis on the women-friendly welfare state towards a strong focus on families' freedom of choice. Freedom of choice emerged as an important discourse among the right-wing parties. From this perspective, people should be free to decide how to manage the balance between work, family and spare time. Women and men should have the same possibilities to combine private and work life, according to their own desires and conditions. The state should *not* intervene everywhere; the family knows best how to distribute work and care and they should be free to choose⁹⁰, for instance, whether they want to buy themselves more time through domestic services. As the Minister for Integration and Gender Equality of the newly-formed right-wing government argued:

⁸⁹ Does the tax deduction mean increased or decreased state responsibility? Ellinor Platzer argues that it means increased state responsibility for social reproduction, not leaving it all to the market (2006). In my analysis I have found that it was often associated with lesser state responsibility, since the state at the same time provide less public service like home help.

⁹⁰ From the point of view of the Christian Democrats, the state should not even set up goals on equal division of housework. More freedom of choice was promoted in care, including the choice of staying home longer with the children with the help of an allowance for home-based childcare. Furthermore, the family was celebrated as a natural unit.

Increased freedom of choice and the possibility for families to actually make those decisions themselves at the kitchen table and make them suitable for the family is in my view most important in gender equality policy (Nyamko Sabuni, Riksdagens protokoll 2006/07: 27, 24 November)

The idea of family self-determination implied distrust in the state in terms of deciding on the social organization of care since “the family knows best”. The individual is capable of taking the best decisions in terms of what is best for his/her family and parents know what is best for their children. The norm of gender equality fades away in this “choice” discourse.

As I have demonstrated here, the analysis of the maid debate in the Swedish parliament reveals different and contesting representations of the problem of gender inequality and shifting ways of legitimizing the welfare state. I have now analyzed the construction of the “maid-problem” as a problem related to gender inequality and class divisions. This debate surrounding the maid problem was closely interrelated with the problem of combining work and family life and I have examined the different representations of this problem. The issue of reconciliation was connected to gender inequality in terms of unequal sharing between women and men of unpaid care and domestic work in the home. But the debate on reconciliation also emphasized women’s labour market participation as the key to gender equality and the underlying norm of paid work can be seen as enhancing the ethics of paid work. I have also showed how the debates legitimated the (shifting boundaries of the) welfare state, from underlining the “women-friendliness” of the universalistic welfare state to focusing on the restructuring of the welfare state to promote “freedom of choice”. In the next sections I will focus more specifically on the adoption of the new policy on tax credit for domestic services.

6.4 Adopting the new policy on tax credit for domestic service

After twelve years of Social Democratic rule, the right-wing “Alliance” won the elections and formed government in 2006. The tax credit for domestic services had been one of the most notable proposals of the Alliance’s campaign and the most important arguments in favour concerned gender equality and the continuous problems of combining work and family life. The Act on tax credits for domestic services was adopted in 2007 and, since then, Swedish households have received a tax reduction equivalent to 50% of the cost of domestic services⁹¹. In this section I will analyze the Government bill, the Act on tax

⁹¹ Act 2007: 346 on tax reduction for domestic work establishes a tax reduction of 50% for the domestic services, but the reduction cannot exceed 50,000 Skr (approximately 5,000 Euros) and cannot be less than 500 Skr (approximately 50 Euros) per year. The services can include cleaning, cooking, care for textiles in the home, taking care of the garden, care work (caring for “physical person”, i.e., the elderly or disabled, etc.) and child care (including taking children to and home from nursery school, etc.). The service has to take place in the home or in close relation to it. The activity can also take place in the home of the parents (living in Sweden) of the person who pays for the services. Care has to be “unskilled” and cannot be the work performed by a doctor or nurse or other medical specialists. Child care does not include education beyond doing homework, etc. Additionally, the Act includes repair, rebuilding and extensions as domestic work.

credit for domestic services and the parliamentary debate preceding the adoption of the Act.

Many aspects of the more than a decade long maid debate emerged again. In the following sections, I will focus particularly on how domestic service was linked to the promotion of economic growth and gender equality. Then I will centre upon the dispute on whether domestic service can be considered a problem or a solution for the welfare state and highlight the legitimization of private solutions. Finally, I analyze the ways in which the discourse provided ambiguous and contradictory subject positions for domestic workers representing them as proud workers and entrepreneurs, on the one hand, and victims of structural exploitation, on the other. I also explore the question of who has been represented to have a legitimate voice in defining problems and solutions.

6.4.1 Domestic service in the name of economic growth and gender equality

Market-produced domestic services are often something that is demanded in order for the individual to be able to work in the labour market to a greater extent, not to be able to have more free time. (Government bill 2006/07: 94)

The potential for increasing employment legitimated the Act on tax credit. The Swedish economy was said to need more paid working hours, especially considering the demographic tensions expected in the future. With the new policy, the formal (“white”) domestic work sector would have better possibilities to compete with the informal (“black”) market and there would be positive effects on the employment and economic growth. The tax credit was considered to lead to the creation of companies in the domestic service sector and to people spending more time in the labour market. The individual would have greater opportunities to do what he/she is best at doing and, thereby, resources would be more efficiently used.

As in the decade long “maid debate”, the Government bill also represented domestic service as a policy problem linked to the problem of combining work and family life and the sexual division of labour. Women still do the majority of care and domestic work and spend more hours in unpaid work than men. The retrenchment of the welfare state was acknowledged; given that women’s care work towards their family and elderly relatives has increased, many women have to reduce their work day or live under great stress. The Government bill emphasized that women and men should be able to participate in the labour market on equal conditions and that they should have the same possibilities of combining family life and work life.

According to the bill, women (implicitly not men) would free themselves from unpaid work and increase paid working time through domestic services. This representation (re)produced the notion of care and domestic work as “women’s work” and not “men’s work”⁹². Domestic service promoted gender equality because women

⁹² As in earlier debates in the parliament, the left-wing parties emphasized that domestic service did not create gender equality because it did not challenge men’s role in domestic and care work. Since it did not

would get a stronger professional position and increase their economic independence by transferring domestic work to someone else.

This way the possibilities are improved for women in particular to liberate themselves replacing unpaid domestic work with paid work or education. In this way women's professional position and women's economic independence can be strengthened. The tax credit can thereby lead to more equal conditions for women and men to combine family life and work life. (Government bill 2006/07: 94)

When it comes to the issue of gender equality for domestic workers, the Government bill emphasized that the position of female domestic workers would also improve as they would go from informal to formal work and from unemployment to employment:

Even if it is a traditional women's work, the professional position and the economic independence will be strengthened for those women who go from black work to white work and for those who go from unemployment to work within this sector. (Government bill 2006/07: 94)

After the adoption of the new policy on domestic service, in the context of the economic crisis, policy debates revolved around the problem of unemployment. Both the left-wing parties, lead by the Social Democratic Party, and the right-wing parties, lead by the Moderate Party, emphasized the "work strategy" (*arbetslinjen*) as the general norm of their political programs. This work strategy can take many different meanings⁹³, but the work ethics already revealed in this analysis is certainly a central element. The road towards gender equality and integration of immigrants was conceived as going through work:

I think a work strategy is important both for integration and gender equality. (Luciano Astudillo. Social Democratic Party, Riskdagens protokoll 2008/09: 47, 11 December).

The issue that we now have to deal with, integration and gender equality, is now more important than ever. The opportunity for all to participate in social life, not

favour greater sharing of care and domestic work between women and men, it was like "sweeping the problem under the carpet": *And so the idea is that you want to increase gender equality by freeing women from domestic work? Then one wonders: What about men? Tax-subsidized domestic services do not solve the problem of the unequal power balance that already exists between men and women. The risk is that injustices and unequal traditional gender roles that exist today will be strengthened. The main problem, namely, that men to a lesser extent than women take responsibility for domestic work, is totally dribbled away. It's a bit like sweeping the problem under the carpet if one thinks that one solves the lack of gender equality between men and women through making it cheaper to hire a third party.* (Marie Engström, Left Party, Riksdagens protokoll 2006/07:116, 30 May). The heterosexual "dual earner" family was a generally taken-for-granted norm. But the emphasis on sharing care and domestic work between women and men was also criticized by right-wing MPs: *Do women just need a man to make daily life work? There must be possibilities to make everyday life function with children and work even if one does not have a husband. Or is the answer that one should go out and get a man?* (Jessica Polfjård Moderate Party, Riksdagens protokoll 2006/07:116, 30 May)

⁹³ For an analysis of the work strategy in Swedish politics see, for example, Junestav 2004.

least work life, is decisive for a society that strives for gender equality and integration. Economic independence is the basis for gender equality as well as for integration issues. (Nyamko Sabuni, Minister of Integration and Gender Equality, Liberal Party, Riskdagens protokoll 2008/09: 47, 11 December)

By the elections in 2010 the issue emerged again in the debates, since the Social Democratic Party, the Left Party and the Green Party promised to derogate the Act on tax credit for domestic services while the Alliance in government pointed at the creation of domestic service employment since the adoption of the policy. Nevertheless, the Act on tax credits for domestic services remains in place since the right-wing Alliance stayed in the government after the elections.

6.4.2 Legitimizing private welfare solutions – and class divisions

The Government bill stated that, since the 1990s, the time family members spend in care work has increased while public home help has decreased. It is especially elderly spouses and middle-aged daughters who have increased their time in care work. Among the elderly with high education there has been an increase in buying private services, but when it comes to the elderly with low education, it is rather family and relatives' amount of care and domestic work that has increased. Here, solutions to the restructuring of the welfare state were located in the private sector and particularly in the market for privately hired domestic workers. Right-wing MPs drew up a dividing line between state responsibilities in elderly care based on need and domestic service based on free choice. The policy on tax credits would help elderly not entitled to municipal home help to be able to pay for some domestic services. Hence, while the welfare state was not considered enough, since women, families with small children and the elderly need more support in daily life, this did not legitimate an extended public sector but market solutions.

At the same time, the Government bill stated that the augmented demand for domestic services was owed to individuals' increasing welfare and income; when the welfare of the individual increases, he/she demands more things that were not among the most necessary. "Quality of life" was emphasized, and idyllic scenarios were contrasted with stressful everyday life:

Many people get worn out and burnt out every year, which would not need to happen if work tasks were better distributed. Also social life is affected by the fact that families are not able to get their life-puzzle to work. Imagine being able to relax with the newspaper or enjoy being with the children after work instead of getting irritated with the dust bunnies that fly around... Imagine being able to sit down and have a cup of coffee, make a nice dinner or take a walk together with your elderly parents while someone else cuts the hedge or the lawn, which you would otherwise have on your consciousness to do then not being able to spend time with the ones you visited. (Karin Nilsson, Centre Party, Riksdagens protokoll 2006/07:116, 30 May)

The tax credit was celebrated as benefiting “common people”, implicitly middle-class families. Now everyone can afford domestic services! Yet, in this statement, the fact that the elderly parents were depicted as having a “lawn to cut” shows that they were definitively not assumed to live in a small apartment somewhere in the suburbs. Left-wing voices drew attention to the idea that state-subsidized domestic services imply a particular kind of privatization of the welfare state and welfare for well-off families. They highlighted the conflict between state-subsidized domestic services in private households and improved public care services and developing of the welfare state. Only well-off households would be able to take advantage of the tax credit; “common people” would not be able to afford the services anyway. They underlined the need to guarantee universal rights by investing the money in childcare and elderly care. The threat of returning to a liberal welfare state with no universal rights but poor relief was put forward:

Elderly care is threatened to go back to poor relief. You mean that well-off middle-aged women with the help of the tax credit can buy cheap domestic services for their parents while the daughters of the working class seldom can afford to buy private help. Also, on this issue one can fear that the proposal of the [right-wing] Alliance will increase class divisions. (Marie Engström, Left Party, Riksdagens protokoll 2006/07:116, 30 May)

From this perspective, when the boundaries of the welfare state are redrawn, class divisions become more visible, and while well-off pensioners pay for private services, family care becomes more and more common among the working class. The proponents of the policy on tax credits generally rejected the idea that such a policy would only benefit the well-off, the middle/upper class, countering that the reform would make domestic service available for all.

But at times the aim of “universalizing” the access to domestic services appeared as secondary. If the policy only benefits the well-off, so what? Class divisions were not a primary concern for the right-wing parties. The following statement reveals the view that class divisions naturally appear in society since some people have higher ambitions in life than others:

If it is so that we should only focus on those who have the lowest incomes and not allow for other sectors to emerge that maybe aspire to other segments of life, why do we permit the production of Volvo XC, or whatever they are called, these huge cars that we see at Östermalm? It is only the well-off who can buy them. Why don't you [the opposition] say that we should forbid the production of BMW, large Volvo cars and everything else that only benefits the rich? The poor can indeed not buy them. (Anne-Marie Pålsson, Moderate Party, Riksdagens protokoll 2006/07:116, 30 May)

The statement ridicules the concern about the tax credit for domestic service only benefiting the privileged. Rather than questioning class inequalities, the statement seems to justify them on the basis that some people are worthy of belonging to a higher “segment” of society because they have higher aspirations than other people, and probably work harder to achieve their goals.

6.4.3 Domestic workers: proud entrepreneurs, exploited workers

In this last section I will analyze subject positions and legitimate voices. As mentioned in the introduction of the chapter, domestic workers themselves were generally absent in the policy debate, which reflects the lack of a contemporary movement of domestic workers in Sweden (Bowman and Cole 2009; Calleman 2007). Furthermore, the focus on women and men who due to their problems of combining work and family life need domestic services seemed to overshadow the subjectivity of the domestic workers, leaving them without voice (see also de los Reyes and Mulinari 2007: 101). Overall, domestic workers were represented as lacking agency. Indeed, they were sometimes described in the parliamentary debates as “invisible” and “silent” women, but generally without an attempt to make them more visible or to make their voices heard.

The subject positions provided for domestic workers in the discourse were, as I have underlined before, ambiguous and contradictory. In the discourse rejecting the tax credit, domestic workers’ subjectivity was marginalized by the focus on all-encompassing structural inequalities and exploitation, on the one hand, and the norm of women and men sharing care and domestic work, on the other hand. The left-wing parties strongly rejected public subsidies for domestic services and, although they considered employment a key to gender equality, they did not want to create more jobs in this low-wage and low-status sector. Although paid domestic work was considered inherently exploiting there were also attempts to enhance the value of domestic work(ers). Nevertheless, the discourse on the gender, class and ethnic inequalities involved in domestic service dominated, and the focus on structural inequalities provided little room for the aspect of valuing paid domestic work and constructing paid domestic work as “real work”.

In contrast to the focus on exploitative structures and women and men’s sharing care and domestic work, the right-wing parties tended to adopt an individualistic perspective on domestic service. At times, the MPs appeared to be speaking on behalf of domestic workers, based on their own experiences speaking with (potential) domestic workers. In these accounts domestic workers were portrayed as individuals, not as a collective of workers, nor referring to any workers’ organization. This can be illustrated by the story about Maria, an immigrant woman:

She came to Sweden with her family and had great ambitions for herself and her children. She was ready to start her new life and start to work, but it was not as easy to find work as Maria had thought. She decided to start a company of her own. The question was what kind of company she would create. What branch did she want to work in and what was she good at? She herself expressed it to me this way: Some people are good at counting. I am good at cleaning. She started a cleaning company and today she has various employees. She is very proud of being able to run a company and offer work to persons who earlier had difficulties in finding work. She feels great professional pride. (Jessica Polfj rd, Moderate Party, Riksdagens protokoll 2006/07:116, 30 May)

In a similar vein, Anne-Marie P lsson, MP of the Moderate Party and initiator of the policy proposal on tax credits, referred to a male sick pensioner who just like Maria had shown great enthusiasm for the possibility of working in the domestic service sector:

A man called me that summer. He was a sick pensioner. He thanked me for the good proposal and said: Well, this is the kind of work that I would be able to do! I am a sick pensioner and cannot work 40 hours in a work place with high work tempo. But to do this kind of activities in private homes when it suits me, under the conditions that work for me, would be a great improvement and would break the isolation that characterizes my life at present. (Anne-Marie Pålsson, Moderate Party, Riksdagens protokoll 2006/07:116, 30 May)

From this perspective, to be considered a legitimate voice, the domestic worker should speak of their individual choice of doing paid domestic work. The legitimate subject was that of the domestic worker who experience individual self-realization through (domestic) work and feel proud of being a worker or, better, an “entrepreneur”. Certainly, in this discourse marked by the norms of individualism, freedom of choice and work ethics, there was little room for recognizing inequalities, exploitation or discrimination. Class and racial/ethnic inequalities in paid domestic work were marginalized. The emphasis fell on the individual choice to “do what one is good at doing”. As Beverly Skeggs argues (2004: 73-4), when it comes to certain kinds of work, what a worker is expected to be good at can be related to personal traits rather than “skill” acquired through education and work experience: the worker should be reliable, trustworthy, meticulous, tidy, efficient, etc. Women workers are often expected to display specific gender characteristics and traits, skills that they are assumed to have just through their positioning by gender. In the story about Maria she was “good at cleaning” and she was also enthusiastic about cleaning, thinking this was a “fun job”:

I think one should do what one is good at doing. And just like Maria said she is good at cleaning. She sees an opportunity to get work and do what she thinks is fun. And she has the possibility to maintain her children, start a company and contribute to the Swedish economy. (Jessica Polfjärd, Moderate Party, Riksdagens protokoll 2006/07:116, 30 May)

This female migrant domestic worker was described as a proud professional. The fact that she was now not only a worker but also an “entrepreneur” was highlighted, which pointed at divisions also within domestic service work; the entrepreneur employing other people to perform the services fitted better the idea of work as a story of success and self-fulfilment. In effect those employees who worked for the entrepreneur were further marginalized in this discourse.

The right-wing parties argued in favour of recognizing paid domestic work as “just another job”. They also emphasized that it is important and essential work because it provides for people’s welfare and wellbeing. From this point of view, the notion of the “maid” was seen as devaluating the domestic worker and as belonging to old times. Curiously, in the debate preceding the adoption of the Act on tax credits for domestic services, the idea of domestic workers as maids was only used by the right-wing parties to stress that the left-wing parties devalued the work. At the same time, structural inequalities in formal paid domestic work dominated by working-class and immigrant women were marginal problems. From this point of view, talking about maids was in itself the problem, not the inequalities involved in work life. In the attempt to revalue the

paid domestic work, domestic workers' special skills were emphasized; individuals should choose to specialize on the kind of work they are good at and, hence, some perform domestic services while others buy them. Contradictory to the emphasis on revaluation, domestic work now and then also appeared as work nobody really wants to do. Right-wing MPs confessed that it is tedious work and that they preferred doing other things. In the end, the aim to revalue paid domestic work has to be considered in the light of the work ethics mentioned earlier. All -formal- paid work was considered good work because it contributed to the Swedish economy. As such, domestic service work was considered a worthy remedy for (immigrants') "mass unemployment", social exclusion and living on the (implicitly too generous) subsidies.

6.5 Conclusions

In this section I will present the conclusions drawn from the Swedish case study. I will first discuss the ways in which the Swedish policy debate framed the problem of reconciling work and family life as a gender inequality problem. On the one hand, there was an emphasis on equal sharing of care and domestic work between women and men and, on the other hand, women's increased participation in the labour market and professional careers were underlined. After that I will focus on the discourse surrounding the welfare state and show how the boundaries of the welfare state were negotiated particularly in the issue of elderly care. The welfare state was legitimized on the basis of its women-friendliness, linked to the norms of universal rights and extensive social policy, but there was also an increasing emphasis on freedom of choice, linked to restructurings of the welfare state and private and market solutions. Finally, I will centre upon the central issue of the maid debate: domestic service and how this topic was articulated as a key issue for gender (in)equality. I show how the problem of gender inequality was linked to structural class and racial/ethnic inequalities by the left-wing parties while female emancipation was individualized and based on the negation of class in the discourse of the right-wing parties.

6.5.1 Reconciliation of work and family life

A central idea in the Swedish welfare state model is that people should be able to combine paid work with having a family, both men and women, and nobody should have to choose between work and family. The debate on domestic services was articulated as closely related to the problem of combining work and family life by all the political parties. The Government bill on tax credits for domestic services emphasized that women and men should be able to participate in the labour market on equal conditions and that they should have the same possibilities of combining family life and work life. Certainly, the political parties widely agreed that gender equality policies have to make it possible for men and women to combine work, family and private life. The problem of sharing care and domestic work between women and men was also highlighted by all actors, concerned about the fact that women continue to be the main persons in charge of children, care for the elderly and housework, and that men do not participate enough in child care and domestic work. The heterosexual couple with children appeared most often as the norm: care and household work should be a shared responsibility in the family supposedly constituted by a woman and a man with children. In current Swedish society the unequal division of care and domestic work is still a problem, and following from this, "working mothers" were represented as the subject suffering from the problem of combining work and family life. Hence they were considered the main subjects of gender equality policies.

Left-wing voices put forward the norm of equality above all, mainly defining equality in terms of an equal sharing of care and domestic work between women and men in the home. Right-wing voices argued in favour of accepting the difference based on the

sexual division of labour and, hence, the solutions proposed focused on turning female-dominated domestic service work into formal work and on liberating double-working mothers from unpaid domestic work. They also strongly put forward the norm of equality in promoting women's liberation from domestic work in order to achieve equal conditions for women and men in the labour market. Women's participation in the labour market was largely considered the key to gender equality.

While the MPs shared views in terms of the centrality of the problem of combining work and family, there were divergent views on how to solve that problem. The right-wing MPs considered the increased access of families to domestic workers to improve gender equality since women would then be able to participate in the labour market as men do, while also managing their "life-puzzle". "Career women" were constructed as a subject that would benefit from domestic service: it would help women to spend more time in advancing their professional careers. Domestic service promoted gender equality because women thereby could get a stronger professional position and increase their economic independence. In contrast, the left-wing parties emphasized that women and men should share the work and not externalize it to "other" women: immigrant women and working-class women. They also emphasized public policies and universal rights as the means to achieving an equal sharing.

In spite of the differences between left and right, employment and the ethics of paid work were generally strong norms. The key to gender equality was women and men's equal participation in the labour market. Economic independence was articulated as a fundamental part of gender equality since women should maintain themselves through work and be able to live on their own salaries. In a similar vein, employment was also considered the key to integration of immigrants. The discourse on employment and the ethics of work was, however, most strongly articulated by the right-wing parties. They suggested that a tax credit for domestic services was a question of economic growth as well as of gender inequality. The tax credit would lead to a creation of many new work opportunities, new companies would emerge in the sector, informal work would turn into formal work and people would spend more time in paid work. Employment was not only a necessary way to ensure economic growth and economic independence but also an essential part of people's identity and self-respect. Creating more employment would lead to more people feeling proud of going to work. Both women and men should work more in paid work and it was therefore necessary to turn women's unpaid work into paid work. Women would free themselves from unpaid work and increase paid working time by buying domestic services. The Swedish economy was said to need more paid working hours, especially considering the demographic tensions expected in the future. In the context of the economic crisis, policy debates revolved around the problem of unemployment and how to create new employment opportunities. Both the main party in the opposition, the Social Democratic Party, and the principle party in the coalition government, the Moderate Party, emphasized the "work strategy" (*arbetslinjen*). Again, the ethics of paid work were reinforced and informed the discourse on gender equality and on integration of migrants.

6.5.2 Elderly care and the shifting boundaries of the welfare state

In the analyzed policy debate we can find different representations of the welfare state, one emphasizing the women-friendly welfare state with universal rights to care services and benefits and a competing discourse underlining the norm of freedom of choice. There was a wide agreement on the idea of Sweden as an international champion of gender equality. The historic role of the women-friendly welfare state in achieving gender equality was nevertheless emphasized mainly by the Social Democratic Party and the Left Party. The Swedish welfare state had helped women to be able to combine work and family, in contrast to “Europe” where women still have to choose between work and children. The welfare state was represented as crucial for women also in the sense that many women are employed in the public sector. The welfare state was seen as facilitating women’s high employment rates, both by means of job opportunities and by means of liberating women from care and domestic work in the home. At the same time it was recognized that welfare state retrenchment had affected women in particular since women in the public sector suffer from worsened working conditions and low salaries.

“Freedom of choice” was as an important discourse among the right-wing parties and eventually the right-wing Alliance government. From this perspective, people should be free to decide how to manage the balance between work, family and spare time. Women and men should have the same possibilities to combine private and work life, according to their own desires and conditions. But the state should not intervene everywhere; the family knows best how to distribute work and care and they should be free to decide “at the kitchen table”. The individual is capable of taking the best decisions in terms of what is best for his/her family, and parents know what is best for their children. The norm of gender equality faded away in this free choice discourse.

The boundaries of the welfare state were negotiated particularly in the issue of elderly care. The political parties appeared to agree that, due to the restructuring of the welfare state, many elderly do not get the help they need. The Government bill on tax credits for domestic services stated that the time family members spend in care work has increased while public home help has decreased. Especially elderly spouses and middle-aged daughters have increased their time in care work. Among the elderly with high education there has been an increase in buying private services, but when it comes to elderly with low education, it is rather family and relatives’ amount of care and domestic work that has increased. Left- and right-wing parties had divergent ideas on what to do about this. The right-wing MPs put an emphasis on market solutions, saying that the elderly should buy the services they need –but are not entitled to– with the help of a tax credit for domestic services. Subsidized domestic service would help the elderly and increase their quality of life and sense of security and facilitate their everyday life and, additionally, it would alleviate the pressure on the municipality and, hence, the welfare state. Right-wing MPs considered the boundaries between state responsibilities in elderly care based on needs and domestic service based on free choice to be unproblematic. The policy on tax credits would help the elderly who are not entitled to municipal home help to be able to pay for some domestic help. Hence, while the welfare state was not considered enough, since women, families with small children and the elderly need more support in daily life, this did not legitimate an extended public sector but individual and market solutions. The critics argued that state-subsidized domestic service involves the

privatization of the welfare state. Given the problems in the public home help, the old and sick do not get the help they need, and then it would not be right to spend the money on people who are well and fit. While high-income families can afford to pay for domestic services on the market, unpaid family care would increase among those with lower incomes or “common people”. This would involve greater class inequalities between women. Thus, the need to guarantee universal rights by investing the money in child care and elderly care was highlighted. The threat of returning to a liberal welfare state with no universal rights but poor relief was emphasized.

6.5.3 Domestic service

As the analysis shows, domestic service has definitively been constructed as a gender equality issue in Sweden and I have examined the ways in which domestic service has been framed as a gender inequality problem. There was a clear left-right division on this issue, where the left emphasized the problem of gender and class inequalities imbedded in paid domestic work and the right emphasized domestic services as the key to gender equality, liberating women from unpaid work and enabling them to dedicate more time to their professional careers.

Left-wing and right-wing parties shared the norm of employment as the key to gender equality. The left-wing parties strongly rejected public subsidies for domestic services and, although they considered employment the key to gender equality, they did not want to create more jobs in this low-wage and low-status sector. They were wary of the low-paid and low-skilled feminized work sector that would be supported through a tax credit for domestic services. The “maid problem” was linked to categories of gender and class and, to a lesser extent, ethnicity. The left frequently returned to the question: who should be the maid of the maid? The creation of maid work would lead to strengthening of class divisions, promoting a feminized low-wage sector. This perspective rejected the subsidizing of the private domestic service sector on the basis that this meant dismantling of the welfare state, subsidizing the domestic work in upper-class households instead of guaranteeing universal rights. The idea of promoting the insertion of migrant women in this specific sector was criticized because this would increase labour market segregation reinforcing inequalities related to ethnic background. Nevertheless, in the discourse rejecting the tax credit for domestic service, domestic workers’ subjectivity was marginalized by the focus on all-encompassing structural inequalities and exploitation and the norm of women and men’s sharing care and domestic work. The discourse on structural gender, class and ethnic inequalities involved in domestic service dominated in a way that provided little room for the aspect of valuing paid domestic work and constructing it as “real work”.

The right-wing parties’ way of framing the issue emphasized that domestic service was just another job, and all (formal and paid) jobs were good for the Swedish economy. Rejecting the term maid, they represented themselves as the ones revaluing domestic work. Domestic service was the key to gender equality for employers and employees alike. Domestic workers would liberate women (and, implicitly, not men) from unpaid work so that they would be able to spend more time in paid work and advance their

professional careers on equal terms with men. The position of female domestic workers would also improve even if it meant promoting traditional “women’s work”: women would go from an informal to a formal work sector and from unemployment to employment. What is more, the policy would create work opportunities for specific categories of women: women with low education, young women and immigrant women. Immigrant women would get their first chance to have a real job and a salary and get to know Swedish people and culture by cleaning their homes. In other words, domestic service would be the key to integration into Swedish society.

In contrast to the focus on exploitative structures and women and men’s sharing care and domestic work, the right-wing parties tended to adopt an individualistic perspective on paid domestic work and the legitimate subject was that of the domestic worker who experience individual self-fulfilment through work and take pride in going to work. The discourse was characterized by the norms of individualism, freedom of choice and work ethics, which provided little room for problems of inequalities, exploitation or discrimination. The (female migrant) domestic worker was described as a proud professional and “entrepreneur”, doing what she has freely chosen to do and what she is “good at doing”. The domestic worker that becomes an entrepreneur employing other people to perform the services fitted better the idea of work as a story of success and self-realization. Contradictory to the attempts to reevaluate the work by emphasizing the skilled domestic worker with professional pride, unpaid domestic work was recognized as tedious work nobody really wants to do. But some individuals should specialize in domestic work so that others can do the things that they are “better at doing” and buy domestic services. The logic behind the idea of valuing paid domestic work has to be considered in the light of the strong norm of economic growth. All formal paid work was considered good work because it contributes to the Swedish economy.

6.5.4 Final reflections

Why has domestic service become such a contentious issue on the agenda in Sweden? Clearly, domestic service has been articulated within a dominating discourse on gender equality. Gender equality has been a dominant discourse in politics for a long time in Sweden (Kvist, Carbin and Harjunen 2009; Magnusson, Rönnblom and Silius 2008). Indeed, gender equality has been constructed as part of the Swedish national identity, wanting to set an example for other countries and the European Union (Hobson, Lewis, and Siim 2002; Towns 2002). Anna Gavanas (2006) links the notion of maids to the construction of the nation as she emphasizes that the idea of maids has become so controversial in Sweden due to discrepancy with the notion of “Swedishness”, conceptualized as international leadership in gender equality and welfare state issues.

As Ellinor Platzer (2007) argues, the emergence of the maid debate in Sweden can be understood in the light of the presence of a strong women’s movement and the institutionalized equality discourse. In this context, the idea that women’s liberation from the double shift of paid employment and unpaid care and domestic work would go through turning to migrant and working-class women collided with (some) feminist and Social Democratic ideals. The maid was a symbol which powerfully drew attention to the

class dimension of domestic service, situating the debate in a specific historical context with strong class inequalities and with strong divisions between masters and servants in the homes (Kvist, Carbin and Harjunen 2009). As we have seen, the left wing parties argued that maids belong to the past. In contrast, by rejecting the term maid, the proponents of the policy of tax credits tried to shift away from the focus on exploitation of working-class and migrant women and the view of employment of domestic workers as an upper-class privilege (Lister et. al. 2007; Platzer 2003; Nyberg 1999). Instead, domestic service was framed as a necessary profession in Sweden where modern families need help to combine paid work and unpaid care and domestic work.

For John Bowman and Alyson Cole, the maid debate was about whether middle-class women who hire domestic workers are creating a new class of marginal workers perpetuating the notion of “women’s work”. It is paradoxical, according to them, that feminists blame women (Bowman and Cole 2009: 171-2). The problem, as they see it, is the blaming of women for exploiting other women for cleaning and care work. They identify this tendency also in the literature on global care chains since poor Third World women assume the roles that First World women have supposedly rejected (ibid. 158-9). I think they have an important point to make in that the analyses of global care chains often presuppose that the care chains essentially involve women, making women and not men responsible for the exploitation of “other” women. In academic studies as well as in the policy debates analyzed here the focus lies on working mothers and female domestic workers. It is problematic to take for granted that both employers and employees are women. But Bowman and Cole themselves contend that “women hire, supervise, and fire their surrogates” (2009: 171). What about single men who hire domestic workers? Or men who are “liberated” from domestic work, equally as women, in a dual career family? If a man and a woman hire a domestic worker, why is the woman considered to be the employer? The theories on global care chains (re)produce the notion of women’s work. Men’s roles should not be overlooked when it comes to domestic service. However, differences in power between women should not be ignored; women are definitively positioned differently in relation to domestic service.

The dual earner model has not significantly changed norms surrounding femininity, masculinity, care and domesticity (Bowman and Cole 2009: 169). Swedish women work double shifts, combining employment with a disproportionate burden of care and domestic work. In spite of the defamilialization of the Swedish welfare state, the responsibility of domestic work still falls upon women. Bowman and Cole argue that there should be no normative constraints to the development of the market of domestic services. They also argue that, although there is something different about household employment, this difference is not reducible to any uniquely exploitative characteristics of the relationship (ibid. 160). The problem is not the commodification of domestic work *per se* but the forms of commodification lacking social protection.

The analysis presented here suggests that it is critical to explore the ways in which this work is constructed as “different” in policies and practices in specific contexts. As researchers have demonstrated, domestic work was historically constructed as “different” in Sweden, which legitimated worse working conditions and lower salaries than in other kinds of jobs. The idea that the state should not intervene in the private home legitimated domestic work to be regulated much later than other kinds of work. And domestic work continues to be “different”: domestic workers employed in private households still do not

have a proper trade union in Sweden (Calleman 2007: 111). Domestic workers were not constructed as legitimate voices in the maid debate. In conclusion, the question is not about whether this work is “naturally” and essentially different from other kinds of work. I have highlighted how paid domestic work was debated as both “different” and “just another job”. Rather than investigating how gender equality is affected by the promotion of domestic service work, I have explored the discursive links between domestic service and dominant notions of gender equality in the case of Sweden.

7 Comparative perspectives

Gender equality is not something that just “is” in some unproblematic way, but something that may be interpreted in many different ways, each with different consequences (Magnusson, Rönnblom and Silius 2008; Verloo 2007; Bustelo and Lombardo 2007). Thus, the purpose of this study is to analyze the ways in which gender (in)equality is produced and given certain meanings while obscuring others.

The study focuses on the construction of gender inequality in the politics of care and for this purpose I selected different debates or policy problems related to care and domestic work. The issue of “reconciliation of work and family life” and the issue of “dependent care” (or elderly care) have traditionally been framed as central to feminist welfare state analysis. As a contrast to the traditional topics of welfare state studies I included the issue of “domestic service”. This issue has often been ignored in gender and welfare state studies, centring mainly upon women’s unpaid care and domestic work. The analysis of paid domestic work contributes to gender and welfare research by taking the view from the margins of the welfare state in a globalized world (Kvist and Peterson 2010). All in all, I have argued that the analyzed policy debates together can be seen as an integral part of the continuous (re)construction, legitimation and negotiation of the welfare state and its boundaries.

The case studies have explored how gender inequality has been framed as a policy problem in the politics of care in Spain and Sweden. This final chapter of the thesis puts the case studies in a comparative perspective. The questions that guided the contrasting of the case studies were: What normative assumptions are shared across countries? What are the context-bound differences and silences? The comparative analysis draws attention to three aspects of the case studies:

- a) the dominating discourse, shared across Spain and Sweden, surrounding the problem of “reconciliation of work and family life” with the normative assumption of women’s labour market participation as the key to gender equality,
- b) the national differences in articulating “domestic service” as a policy problem, a salient gender equality issue on the Swedish political agenda and a marginal issue in Spain,
- c) the shifting representations and legitimation of the welfare state, contrasting the discourse on the women-friendly welfare state and the discourse on freedom of choice.

I conclude with a reflection related to the theoretical discussion of the challenges to the notion of the women-friendly welfare state and the analytical approach adopted in this thesis. I also draw up some questions and avenues for future research.

7.1 Shared normative assumptions: the reconciliation of work and family life

The “reconciliation of work and family life” was articulated as a crucial policy problem in both Spain and Sweden; in Spain this was a relatively “new” debate, whereas in Sweden it was “old”. In both contexts the problem was strongly linked to gender inequality. For the sake of contrasting the case studies, I here present briefly some of the main findings related to the problem of combining work and family life in Spain and Sweden. I then focus on the shared normative assumptions and the implications of the neo-liberal discourse.

When the issue of reconciliation of work and family life emerged on the agenda in Spain in the mid 1990s with the Conservative government, it was framed as a “working mother’s” issue. Women should have children but women’s place was considered to be in the labour market. Women’s increased labour market participation was emphasized, both as a fact - women had been massively incorporated in the formal labour market - and as a norm - women should be working outside the home. Women’s labour market participation was represented as the key to gender equality. The dominant discourse on gender equality reinforced the norm of inclusion; the inclusion of women in formal employment on an equal footing with men. Masculine norms in work life were not challenged. The problem representation that highlighted the unequal distribution of care and domestic work responsibilities between women and men contrasted with the lack of policy measures addressing men. The framing of gender inequality was informed by a neo-liberal discourse emphasizing employment, economic growth, individual responsibility and modernization. The modern working mother combining professional career and care for children became the legitimate subject of gender equality and the symbol of national progress. This can be understood in the light of the relatively recent increase in women’s labour market participation since the establishment of the democracy. In Sweden working mothers were not representing national progress in the same way, but then Swedish women have a longer history of participation in formal labour markets and women’s employment is taken for granted. In Spain the discourse linking working mothers and national progress seemed to promote the “superwoman” as a solution to problems of low birth rates and scarce welfare provision. At the same time, the policies on reconciliation privileged those who had a formal employment, thereby excluding certain groups of women: unemployed women and employees of the informal sector, often working-class and migrant women.

During the Socialist government the reconciliation of family and work life continued to be a salient issue. While “working mothers” were still the legitimate subject of these policies and, in extension, of gender equality, the focus was extended to fathers and “co-responsibility”. In the Equality Act co-responsibility referred to the sharing of care and domestic work between women and men; co-responsibility was seen as the key to achieve gender equality, and the new individual paternity leave was celebrated as a ground-breaking measure promoting co-responsibility. At the same time, new pro-natal policies constructed women as mothers, emphasizing the importance of motherhood (over fatherhood) and underlining working mothers’ contribution to the economy and national progress. Importantly, gender equality continued to be located within a discourse

endorsing economic growth and employment, promoting “equal opportunities” in the labour market and “women’s employability” - women’s adaptation to labour market requirements, not the reverse. On the margins of the reconciliation debate, “immigrant women” emerged as a category attributed great problems of reconciling work and care. While the policy debate on reconciliation commonly produced a homogeneous category of women, immigrant women were here also framed as a unitary category. These representations produced an image of the “Third-World woman” as the oppressed “other” (Mohanty 1994). The problem of reconciliation of work and family life turned into a problem of integration for female migrants who were assumed to be the exclusive caregivers.

In Sweden a central idea embedded in the welfare state is that people should be able to combine paid work with having a family, both men and women, and nobody should have to choose between work and family. The analyzed policy debate emphasized that women and men should be able to participate in the labour market on equal conditions and that they should have the same possibilities of combining family life and work life. Gender equality policies largely aimed to make it possible for men and women to combine work, family and private life. The problem of sharing care and domestic work between women and men was highlighted by all political parties, but left-wing voices put forward the norm of equality in terms of an equal sharing of care and domestic work between women and men in the home more strongly. At the same time, with reference to the unequal division of unpaid labour in Swedish society, working mothers were represented as the subject suffering from the problem of combining work and family life. Right-wing voices argued in favour of recognizing the difference based on the sexual division of labour proposing solutions to turn the female-dominated domestic service work into formal work and to liberate double-working mothers from unpaid domestic work. They also strongly put forward the norm of equality in terms of women’s liberation from domestic work in order to achieve equal conditions for women and men in the labour market. Women’s participation in the labour market was largely considered the key to gender equality and, hence, employment was put forward as a strong norm. In general, economic independence was articulated as a fundamental part of gender equality since women should be able to maintain themselves through work. Economic independence informed the discourse on gender equality and on migrants’ integration in Swedish society as well. Economic independence, in contrast, was seldom emphasized as a norm in the Spanish context.

The discourse on employment generated a certain ethic of paid work in the Swedish context. This was more strongly articulated by the right-wing parties, in government since 2006. In their view, the tax credit for domestic services was a question of economic growth, with effects on gender inequality. The increased access of families to domestic workers would improve gender equality since women would then be able to participate in the labour market as men do, while also managing their “life-puzzle”. Women would be able to free themselves from unpaid work and increase paid working time through domestic services. Career women would spend more time advancing their professional careers. Hence, domestic service promoted gender equality because women would improve their professional position and increase their economic independence. The Swedish economy was said to need more paid working hours, especially considering the demographic tensions expected in the future. Hence, both women and men should work

more in paid work and it was therefore necessary to turn unpaid work into paid work. Furthermore, the tax credit would lead to the creation of many new job opportunities, new companies would emerge in the sector and informal work would turn into formal work. Employment was considered an essential part of people's identity and self-respect. Creating more employment would thus lead to more people feeling proud of going to work. This kind of ethics of work was not found in the Spanish policy discourse on the reconciling of work and family life and gender equality. The explicit emphasis on individuals' self-fulfilment and self-esteem through work and identity as proud workers was absent in the Spanish context even though there was a strong focus on employment and economic growth.

In both the Spanish and the Swedish national contexts, the dominant gender equality discourse was articulated within the framework of a neo-liberal discourse on employment and promoting economic growth. Overall, the debates on reconciliation operated within the premise of women's labour market participation as the key to gender equality. This was indeed a predominant normative assumption in both Spain and Sweden. In both cases there was also a strong focus on the importance of economic growth or stability. The importance attributed to employment and economic growth in Spain and Sweden can be seen as an example of how dominant growth has become in politics and how the goal of gender equality has been informed by this neo-liberal discourse (Rönnblom 2009; Lombardo, Meier and Verloo 2009). When gender equality is understood in relation to growth, women's participation in the labour market is seen to be mainly about changing women in order to make them fit the labour market demands and expectations, as articulated in the idea of "women's employability". Within this vein, the dominant vision of gender equality was characterized by a liberal discourse of inclusion in both Spain and Sweden; women should participate in the labour market in the same way as men do; masculine norms were not challenged, rather, women should adapt to them (Squires 1999). When women's subordinate role in the paid labour market appeared in the policy debates, it was mainly viewed as being caused by women's primary role in unpaid care and domestic work. As such, fathers were attributed an important role in terms of sharing care and domestic work with women, thereby also facilitating women's labour market participation. The discourse on reconciliation of work and family life privileged inequalities produced by gender and the man/woman binary and tended to conceive the "home" as oppressive while the public sphere and paid work were viewed as the key to emancipation (Mohammad 2004).

In both the Spanish and Swedish national contexts the "working mother" appeared as a central subject in the gender equality discourse, with reference to the sexual division of labour and the unequal distribution of unpaid care and domestic work between women and men. Working mothers operated as a normative category implicitly associated with white, autochthonous, middle-class, heterosexual women. As such, it was also exclusionary. Both Spanish and Swedish debates implicitly enhanced a heterosexual norm, particularly evident in the discourse on sharing care and domestic work and "co-responsibility". Definitively, the heterosexual couple with children appeared most often as the unquestioned norm, and care and domestic work should be a shared responsibility of "the man and the woman" in order to achieve gender equality. The discourse on reconciliation of work and family life in both Spain and Sweden tended to enhance the dual earner family as the norm, emphasizing that both men and women work, and should

work, outside the home. In this sense, the analysis of the policy debates indicates a discursive shift away from the norm of the male breadwinner model in the Spanish case, whereas in Sweden the dual earner model has dominated for decades.

Employment was emphasized, both in the name of economic growth and of gender equality. The similarities between the Swedish and Spanish policy debates on reconciliation of work and family life and women's employment can be related to the supranational context of the European Union, where gender equality measures have been shaped by the agenda of creating employment and the European Employment Strategy (Outshoorn and Kantola 2007; Stratigaki 2004; Rubery 2002). Researchers have pointed out that the changes in the European welfare states have involved a general shift towards a dual earner model assuming women's involvement in the labour market as the norm. European Union policies and national policies surrounding care have been framed within a discourse that emphasizes employment, global competitiveness, and the problems of ageing populations and low birth rates. As policies in the European Union have tended to stress the importance of employment, and women's labour market participation has been prioritized over care-related needs, dominant discourses have generally elevated the "ethics of work", not the "ethics of care" (Williams 2010; Hrženjak 2007). The association of paid work with success and emancipation can be said to overshadow problems of discrimination, exploitation and inequalities in work life. Moreover, the association of paid work with autonomy, self-fulfilment and choice can be argued to reflect the experience of relatively privileged women. Furthermore, representing paid work as emancipation can be seen as devaluing unpaid domestic and care work (Bacchi 1999). Nancy Fraser argues that any employment-centred welfare state model will have difficulties in constructing a respectable status for those defined as "non-workers"; by valorising paid work, it implicitly devalues unpaid work. While paid employment is indeed crucially important for women, we need to reflect critically on the convergence of "feminist interests" emphasizing women's employment with the interests of global capitalism (Fraser 2009; Hrženjak 2007; Barker 2005). In the name of female emancipation, paid work seems to be further appraised and this vision of gender equality is based on the negation of class.

7.2 Context-bound differences and silences: domestic service

The analysis of the policy debates surrounding domestic service shows how an issue can become a contentious problem on the agenda in one national context while in another context it is a marginal issue on the agenda. Attention to the Swedish policy debate surrounding domestic service shows how an issue can become a controversial gender (in)equality problem on the agenda in one national context while it is rather disconnected from gender equality in another, as is the case in Spain. Why has domestic service become such a divisive gender issue on the agenda in Sweden and not in Spain?

In Sweden domestic service has been articulated as an important policy problem within a dominating discourse on gender equality. Gender equality has been a dominant discourse in politics for a long time in Sweden (Magnusson, Rönnblom and Silius 2008). Indeed, gender equality has even been constructed as part of the national identity (Towns

2002) and the idea of “maids”, associated with the exploitation of working-class and migrant women, as controversial in Sweden can be understood in the light of the notion of Swedishness as international leadership in gender equality and welfare state issues (Gavanas 2006). The analysis shows that the issue of paid domestic work was highly controversial but none of the actors questioned the idea of domestic service as crucially related to gender (in)equality. In contrast, gender equality policies are relatively new in Spain, although many policy measures have been adopted to promote gender equality in the last decade. The Socialist Party in government in Spain since 2004 has turned gender equality into a central issue on the political agenda and during this Socialist government the Equality Act was adopted. But there has been no political consensus on the importance of the issue. Although the feminist movement has debated the issue of paid domestic work, the official policy discourse on gender equality has not included the issue of domestic service, neither in terms of liberating women from care and domestic work nor in terms of female domestic workers’ rights. The Swedish so-called maid debate reveals problem representations of gender inequality which hardly appear in the Spanish context as the debate in Sweden is crucially about the intersection of gender and class (Kvist and Peterson 2010). Class inequalities were generally an ignored problem in Spanish gender equality policies, in contrast to the frequency with which class inequalities appeared in the Swedish debates. In sum, the analysis demonstrates national differences when it comes to recognizing domestic service as a policy problem. And there are clearly context related national differences when it comes to the question of if and to what extent domestic service is linked to the problem of gender inequality.

In order to contrast the two case studies, I present below some of the main findings related to the debates surrounding domestic service. I also pay attention to the context-bound silences on the agenda in each case study. In Spain domestic service has been a marginal issue in policy debates. When domestic service has appeared on the agenda it has mainly been framed as an issue of domestic workers rights. In contrast, domestic service has hardly been framed as an issue of gender inequality in gender equality policies. The Special Regime for Domestic Workers provides far less social protection for workers than the General Regime of the Social Security system. Indeed, the European Commission has censured the Special Regime for Domestic Workers for violating the European Directive on equal treatment of men and women and, particularly, the Directive on equal treatment in the Social Security system. Recently, the Socialist government has come to an agreement with the main trade unions, the General Workers’ Union *UGT* and Workers’ Commissions *CCOO*, to improve the status of domestic workers by integrating the Special Regime into the General Regime of the Social Security system. After the adoption of the Social Security Reform Act in August 2011 a general reform of the Special Regime is under way. Nonetheless, the General Regime will still establish some special rules applied to domestic workers in a Special System for Domestic Workers.

In spite of the changes under way, domestic service has not been considered a controversial issue and it has largely been disconnected from gender inequality. The analysis shows a widespread acceptance of domestic service as a solution to problems of reconciling work and family life in the context of a limited welfare state. The problem of reconciliation of work and family life was a privileged issue, and here gender inequality was mainly linked to women’s *unpaid* care and domestic work. In spite of the importance of domestic workers in welfare provision at the level of social practice, there has been

very little policy debate on the issue of *paid* domestic work. Moreover, the perpetuation of the sexual division of labour, along divisions of class, race/ethnicity and nationality, by means of transferring care work and domestic work from Spanish men and women to “other” women, has hardly ever been disputed or challenged in Spanish policy debates as in Sweden. In the debates on the “reconciliation of work and family life” and “dependent care” the figure of the domestic worker was almost entirely ignored. The dominant policy frames on the reconciliation of work and family life enhanced the category of the working mother combining unpaid care and paid employment as a norm and the ways in which the welfare state often relies on the precarious paid work of female migrant domestic workers were overshadowed. In other words, domestic (care) workers were the invisible “other” in Spanish gender equality policies (Peterson 2007). Female (migrant) domestic workers were not subjects but mainly the means to solve (Spanish) families’ reconciliation problems.

The Special Regime for Domestic Workers established in 1985 was the focus of a parliamentary debate on domestic service in 2005. Domestic workers’ rights were debated in relation to a proposal presented by the Galician Nationalist Party to reform the Special Regime and thereby improve the social protection of domestic workers. Certainly, the Social Security system has constructed paid domestic work as “different” from “normal” types of work. This different character of domestic work was underlined in diverse ways in the parliamentary debate on domestic service, from highlighting the problem of “servitude” inherent in this sector to claiming that this work is impossible to regulate due to its special nature, the work place being a private home. In the parliamentary debate the general argument was that domestic service is necessary to make family and work life feasible since women are participating in the formal labour market. Given the prevailing idea, promoted by both Socialists and Conservatives, that women’s labour market participation increased gender equality, it can be argued that the view was that domestic service contributed to gender equality, in terms of helping women to reconcile work and family life. However, this connection was only implicit. Some left-wing voices addressed inequality and discrimination of domestic workers related to class, gender and migration emphasizing that paid domestic work is a female and migrant dominated work which attain little social value and weak social rights. Improving the conditions of the sector would improve the situation of the many women employed in this kind of work. But, overall, the debate did not reflect a strong connection between domestic service with the gender equality discourse.

The parliamentary debate was articulated as related to the question of finding solutions to Spanish families’ reconciliation problems, revealing the tensions between the focus on domestic worker’s rights, on the one hand, and the focus on Spanish middle-class families’ interests and needs, on the other. Furthermore, the rights discourse seemed marginal in relation to the neo-liberal discourse privileging the norms of employment and economy growth. The analysis shows how domestic service was constructed as a practical private solution to welfare state problems and scarce care provision. The wide acceptance of such private solutions can even be seen as justifying the lack of state responsibility in care provision, reinforcing individual responsibility and the legitimacy of the “non-caring state”. The discourse focusing on the employers of domestic workers and their reconciliation problems did not appear to provide much space for migrant domestic workers’ voices. The privileging of the problem of reconciliation of work and

family life, middle-class families' interests, economic growth and employment marginalized domestic workers as subjects.

The Swedish policy debate on domestic service, the maid debate, emerged in the mid 1990s. As we have seen, domestic service has definitively been constructed as an important policy problem on the agenda in Sweden. Since the material I analyze mainly includes parliamentary debates, the left-right divisions on the issue have been central, but I have also emphasized the normative assumptions that all actors seem to share. The issue of paid domestic work was controversial but none of the actors questioned that domestic service is essentially related to gender (in)equality. Both the left-wing and the right-wing parties shared the norm of employment as the key to gender equality. But the left-wing parties strongly rejected public subsidies for domestic services and, although they considered employment a key to gender equality, they did not want to create more jobs in what they considered a low-wage, low-skill and low-status sector. The problem of domestic service was linked to categories of gender and class and, to a lesser extent, ethnicity. The creation of jobs within the domestic service sector would lead to strengthening gender and class divisions; mainly working-class women would perform this work. The insertion of migrant women in this specific sector was criticized because this would increase labour market segregation reinforcing inequalities related to ethnic background. Women and men should share care and domestic work instead of externalizing the work to "other" women. The discourse emphasizing structural gender, class and ethnic inequalities, on the one hand, and the norm of women and men's sharing care and domestic work, on the other hand, provided little room for domestic workers' subjectivity and voices. The subsidizing of the private domestic service sector was also rejected on the basis that this meant dismantling of the welfare state, subsidizing the domestic work in upper-class households, supporting well-off pensioners and families with small children, instead of guaranteeing universal rights.

Right-wing parties represented domestic service as the key to equality for female employers and employees. Domestic workers would liberate women (and, implicitly, not men) from unpaid work so that they would be able to spend more time in paid work and advance their professional careers on equal terms with men. Tax credits for domestic services would also improve the situation of female domestic workers, although it was recognized that traditional notions of "women's work" were not challenged. But domestic workers would go from an informal to a formal work sector and from unemployment to employment. What is more, domestic service would be a key to integration into Swedish society. Immigrant women would get their first chance to have a real job and a salary and get to know Swedes and Swedish culture from within. Rejecting the term "maid", right-wing parties represented themselves as the ones revaluing domestic work. In contrast to the focus on exploitative structures and women and men's sharing care and domestic work, the right-wing parties tended to adopt an individualistic perspective and represented domestic workers as experiencing self-fulfilment through work and feeling professional pride. The female migrant domestic worker was described as an "entrepreneur", doing what she has freely chosen to do and what she is "good at doing". The domestic workers that become entrepreneurs employing other people to perform the services fitted better the idea of work as a story of success. This discourse, characterized by the norms of individualism, freedom of choice and work ethics, provided little room

for problems of inequalities and exploitation (see Gavanas 2010). It consequently ignored the gender, class, and race/ethnic relations involved in paid domestic work.

The logic behind the idea of valuing paid domestic work has to be considered in the light of the work ethics and the focus on economic growth. The right-wing parties emphasized that domestic service is “just another job” and all -formal- paid work was considered good work because it contributes to the Swedish economy. With the Act introducing a tax credit for domestic services, adopted in 2007 after the right-wing Alliance had formed government, Swedish debates can be said to have shifted towards a stronger focus on middle-class families’ problems of combining work and family life, regarding domestic service as a solution in the context of welfare state retrenchment. In contrast to the Swedish right-wing parties efforts to articulate paid domestic work as “just another job”, in Spain domestic service has been articulated as essentially different within the institutional framework of the Social Security System: in the *Special Regime for Domestic Workers*. The reform of the Special Regime recently initiated by the government reinforces the framing of domestic service as a question of workers’ rights, but not as a question of gender (in)equality.

7.3 Legitimizing the welfare state: women-friendliness and beyond

The analysis indicates that there is a continuous negotiation of what problems are public problems and what problems are and should be private problems. Dominating discourses have material effects and they are interesting to study in order to reveal the ways in which the state defines and legitimizes certain issues as private problems, attributed individual responsibility, and others as public problems, attributed state responsibility. Such articulations of private and public problems obviously have gendered effects. Instead of assuming the existence of a women-friendly or un-friendly welfare state in general terms, I have explored the ways in which specific policy debates frame gender inequality as a problem and how these debates legitimize the welfare state by constructing it as women-friendly -or not.

Whereas Spanish policy debates at times referred to the Nordic welfare state as an ideal women-friendly model, the Swedish debates seemed to be shifting away from the discourse on the women-friendly welfare state towards a focus on freedom of choice. In Spain the welfare state has been extended and developed in some areas during the last decade, in elderly care and the reconciliation of work and family life. The Equality Act promoted greater “co-responsibility” between women and men in care by introducing an individual paternity leave. The Dependent Care Act was articulated as developing the welfare state towards a more women-friendly state, helping liberate women from “care” and allow them to “work”. However, private and individual solutions to the problem of care remained generally unchallenged. As an example, the general acceptance of domestic service as a form of care provision can be seen as reinforcing the legitimacy of the “non-caring state”.

The analysis shows that there was a wide agreement on the idea of Sweden as an international leader of welfare and gender equality, but the historic role of the women-

friendly welfare state in achieving gender equality was emphasized mainly by the left-wing parties. From this perspective, the Swedish welfare state was represented as women-friendly in terms of helping women to combine work and family life and in terms of employing many women in the public sector. At the same time, it was generally recognized that welfare state retrenchment had affected women in particular, as workers in the public sector and as unpaid care workers. Thus, the Swedish welfare state was not considered as women-friendly as it had used to be. “Freedom of choice” was an important discourse among the right-wing parties. From this perspective, the state should not intervene everywhere; the family should be free to decide “at the kitchen table” how to manage the balance between work, family and spare time. The individual is capable of taking the best decisions in terms of what is best for his/her family. The norm of gender equality faded away in this free choice discourse. The right-wing Alliance in government since 2006 has argued in favour of reducing state responsibilities by restructuring social benefits and services, fomenting private initiatives and emphasizing individual responsibility. Following from this, the critics have argued that state-subsidized domestic service involves a form of privatization of the welfare state and the dismantling of the Swedish welfare model. They emphasized the need to guarantee universal rights by investing in child care and elderly care. Nevertheless, there seems to be shift away from the discourse on the women-friendly welfare state towards a stronger focus on freedom of choice.

To conclude, I return to the theoretical discussion of the challenges to the notion of the women-friendly welfare state and the analytical approach adopted in this thesis. Comparative feminist welfare studies have put forward a certain type of welfare state as normative and women-friendly and these models have been related to the welfare state which extensively assumes responsibility for care provision. As such, social policy has been conceived as the very embodiment of the women-friendliness of welfare states. In this thesis I have precisely analyzed social policy related to care and domestic work. However, as I have argued, the very notion of a women-friendly welfare state is challenged by the developments in feminist thought, critical welfare state studies and global care chains research, which question any unitary understandings of the category “women”. As Judith Butler (1990) argues, the category “women” is normative and exclusionary and is commonly invoked with the dimensions of class and racial privilege intact. Gender must, therefore, be understood as inherently interlocked with categories such as class, race/ethnicity and sexuality. Research on the globalization of care work has exposed women’s different positions in relation to care and domestic work. The insights stemming from the studies on global care chains point at the need to examine welfare states as involving policies and practices of exclusion and inclusion. Gender is not constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts and, following from this, gender relations cannot be understood without being contextualized. Within this vein, the present analysis has explored the ways in which gender and gender (in)equality are discursively produced in policy debates in the specific contexts of Spain and Sweden.

The thesis uses the concept of political intersectionality as an analytical tool, whereby I analyze discourses according to their underlying normative assumptions and exclusions, and the ways in which the discourses provide certain subject positions in a given context (Dahl 2000). The intersectional analysis emphasizes that social policies designed to create gender equality can marginalize “other” women by privileging the

experiences of certain categories of women and men. The argument is that the welfare state cannot be seen as *a priori* “women-friendly” or “unfriendly”, but in-depth empirical studies can reveal how specific public policies construct gender, and gender (in)equality, and help us interpret potential empowering or disempowering effects. In other words, rather than presupposing that Spain is a “women-unfriendly” welfare state and Sweden is a “women-friendly” welfare state, I have analyzed the ways in which specific policy debates surrounding care and domestic work construct gender inequality as a policy problem in each national context. As I have argued, care-related policies can, by and large, be considered favourable for women in terms of enabling them to be mothers of small children and daughters to elderly parents and, at the same time, to have paid work. Nevertheless, care policies cannot be interpreted as *automatically* empowering for *all* women in the same way. Whereas comparative gender and welfare studies often ignore the ways in which policies privilege some women and men over others, the present work has drawn attention to such processes of inclusion and exclusion. The analysis attributes importance to both dominating discourses and silences in the agenda. The thesis emphasizes that social policies designed to create gender equality can marginalize “other” women by privileging certain categories of women and men and the analysis of the case studies illustrates this in various ways. For instance, both in the Spanish and Swedish context, the “working mother” appeared as a central subject in the gender equality discourse, with reference to the unequal distribution of unpaid care and domestic work between women and men. Working mothers operated as a normative and exclusionary category implicitly associated with white, autochthonous, middle- (or upper-) class heterosexual women. The association of paid work with choice, emancipation and success can be argued to reflect the experience of relatively privileged women while ignoring the implications of class. Furthermore, representing paid work as emancipation can be seen as devaluing unpaid domestic and care work and those regarded as “non-workers”. At the same time, the dominant view of gender equality was characterized by a discourse of “inclusion” according to which women should participate in the labour market in the same way as men do privileging, not challenging, masculine norms and promoting the adaptation of women to labour market requirements, not the reverse. Following from this, gender equality policies can be seen as informed by a neo-liberal discourse emphasizing employment, economic growth and individual responsibility.

7.4 Further questions and avenues for future research

The research process has raised a number of questions that are beyond the scope of this study. Several themes of the research are not thoroughly developed in the thesis but have relevance for the study of gender inequality, the politics of care and welfare states. To conclude, I will draw up some questions and avenues for future research.

This thesis analyzes different representations of gender inequality as a policy problem and it scrutinizes the underlying normative assumptions underpinning such representations. It analyzes dominant discourses surrounding gender (in)equality by means of an analysis of authoritative official policy documents. This top-down

perspective delimits the scope of analysis: since the analysis is delimited to written, official state sources -acts, government bills, parliamentary bills, policy plans and parliamentary debates- the ways in which subjects reproduce, question and/or challenge dominating discourses become less visible. Discourses are not fixed systems of meanings and there is always space for agency, for actors to shape discourse. An interesting path for future research would be to explore the ways in which policy-makers and other political actors (re)produce and/or challenge the dominant discourses on gender equality. This would mean going beyond the focus on written policy texts and include interviews with actors involved in policy-making.

A top-down perspective, I have argued, is useful to address a weakness in the literature on global care chains. By focusing upon the migration process and the experiences of paid domestic workers and to a much lesser extent focusing on the (welfare) state, theories of global care chains do not pay sufficient attention to the role of the state in articulating positions, meanings and value of paid care and domestic work(ers). The empirical analysis I develop in this thesis explores the ways in which the state, through its public policies, shapes the social organization of care and the positioning of domestic workers. Public policies operate as enabling and/or restraining for migrant domestic workers in specific contexts. Many sociological studies have focused on the experiences of migrant domestic workers and I recognize the relevance of such a bottom-up perspective as well. An avenue for future research would be to look more into how migrant domestic (care) workers lived experiences and strategies are informed by particular care and migration policies and regimes.

A theme that could not be substantially developed in this thesis is the issue of immigration policies. The analysis focuses upon debates surrounding care and domestic work and the issue of migration enters through this door, in terms of a theoretical link between feminist welfare state research and the literature on global care chains and in terms of the empirical material in which migrant women have appeared in relation to the politics of care. However, immigration policies could fruitfully be incorporated in order to grasp the interconnections with the welfare state and the politics of care. As we have seen, in Europe and particularly Southern Europe, in the context of the dual earner model, the ageing populations and the inadequate care services, migrant women have become an increasingly important asset of care provision. Migrant women from poorer countries perform care work in richer countries, often for low wages and restrained by migration regulations. Care regimes privilege certain forms of caregiving work over others; they involve different ways of packaging paid and unpaid, family and non-family, public and private modes of providing care (Anttonen and Sipilä 1996). As such, care regimes inform the insertion of migrants into formal or informal care work and the formation of global care chains. Migration regimes, in turn, reinforce practices of exclusion and inclusion; they establish the norms and rules regulating social rights, citizenship and labour migration. Such regimes establish notions of the desirability of immigration, often determined by the needs of the labour market including the need for “skilled” or “unskilled” care workers (Lutz 2008; Williams and Gavanas 2008). Future research could explore further the linkages between care and migration regimes and the question of how national care and migration regimes constrain and enable migrant care workers.

While national policies are crucial, the European Union and the processes of Europeanization also shape welfare states, the social organization of care and migration

patterns today. The study of the European Union and Europeanization has focused on the impact of the EU on national policies and the compliance with EU law. But the study of the European Union has also taken into account recent developments in the field aiming to understanding policy change through norm diffusion and social learning, and making the inclusion of soft policy essential to the analysis (Lombardo and Forest 2011). This leaves space for analysing the ways in which the Europeanization process informs, and is informed by, national policy regimes surrounding gender, care and migration.

The issue of migration raises further questions about the relationship between gender and nation (Yuval Davis 1997; Williams 1995). That gender, class and race/ethnicity are categories strongly interrelated with care work has been emphasized by many studies. However, in order to better understand the linkages between the welfare state and global care chains, the nation becomes an important category for intersectional analysis. The analysis of the nation, seen as an “imagined community” (Anderson 1991) is essentially about who is constructed as belonging and who is excluded, who can be a legitimate member of the community and who cannot, who has the right to social benefits and who has not. We have seen how migrant women often bridge the gap between the need for care and the care and domestic work provided by the welfare state. At the same time, the welfare state is inherently exclusionary and often delimits the entitlements to social benefits and care services to nationals. Immigration is generally considered a privilege, not a right, and states attempt to curb illegal immigration (Mayall 1990). In the Nordic states including Sweden immigration has been articulated as a threat to the welfare state by extreme right wing parties wanting to reinforce the “nation” by articulating a conflict between nationals and immigrants in the access to welfare state resources. The tensions and contradictions between the need for care and domestic workers and the demands for restrictive migration policies could be explored.

Another theme that the thesis has not developed sufficiently is related to the most recent shifts in the Spanish and Swedish welfare states. The economic crisis is seriously affecting the welfare state in Spain, and the developments in social policy have come to an end at this moment. This thesis has not specifically addressed the effects of this crisis. This will be a crucial topic for future studies in a context of international pressures on further cuts in social spending and social movements increasingly manifesting the criticism towards the handling of the economic crisis with banners that warn: “welfare state for sale”. In the Swedish case the effects of the wide-ranging restructurings of the welfare state during the right-wing government is an important research topic that has not been sufficiently explored in this thesis. Furthermore, the Swedish case study has been more limited than the Spanish case and could usefully be developed in order to include the issues of elderly care and combining of work and family life as issues studied in their own right and not in connection with the “maid debate”. Definitively, the analysis of the impact on gender relations of the recent shifts in these European welfare states could be fruitfully explored in future research.

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Resumen español

Introducción

Dada la división del trabajo en función del género, por la cual las mujeres, y no los hombres, realizan la mayor parte del trabajo doméstico y de cuidados, la investigación feminista sobre el Estado del bienestar ha convertido los cuidados en un tema central. Todos los Estados del bienestar se posicionan en relación a los cuidados: cómo deberían realizarse, por quiénes y dónde (Sundström 2003). Los modelos de Estado del bienestar en los que el Estado asume en gran medida la responsabilidad de provisión de cuidados se han considerado más favorables para las mujeres, más “*women-friendly*” (Lewis 1992; Anttonen 2005; Sainsbury 1999; Daly 2001). La organización social de los cuidados puede considerarse un asunto importante para la política social en los Estados del bienestar europeos en el contexto del envejecimiento de la población, la reestructuración del Estado del bienestar y la norma de la familia de “doble sueldo” (Leira y Saraceno 2002). Mediante el análisis de las políticas actuales relacionadas con los cuidados podemos entender los procesos de cambio en los Estados del bienestar europeos. Además, la globalización del trabajo doméstico y de cuidados ha llegado a ser un fenómeno importante en Europa, en particular allí donde escasea la provisión por parte del Estado del bienestar. El fenómeno de las “cadenas globales de cuidados”, donde las mujeres migrantes del Tercer Mundo realizan trabajo doméstico y de cuidados en hogares del Primer Mundo, señala la cada vez más compleja relación entre la desigualdad de género y los cuidados.

Esta tesis se propone explorar cómo la desigualdad de género se ha formulado como un problema público en las políticas europeas en torno a los cuidados en el periodo entre 1995 y 2010. De este modo se analiza cómo se ha formulado la desigualdad de género como un problema público en dos Estados del bienestar europeos: España y Suecia. Se definen las políticas en torno a los cuidados como un proceso de construcción de significados alrededor de los cuidados. La tesis analiza tres diferentes debates políticos que giran en torno al trabajo doméstico y de cuidados, tradicionalmente asociados con “trabajo de mujeres”: la “conciliación de la vida familiar y laboral”, el “cuidado de personas en situación de dependencia” y el “servicio doméstico”. Considero que estos debates políticos reflejan la (re)construcción y legitimación del Estado del bienestar y el análisis revela la constante negociación de los límites del Estado del bienestar. Además, estos debates revelan las diferentes y cambiantes interpretaciones de la relación entre la (des)igualdad de género y el Estado del bienestar.

El título de la tesis –*Beyond the women-friendly welfare state: Framing gender inequality as a policy problem in Spanish and Swedish politics of care*⁹⁴– está relacionado con el marco teórico de la tesis, que valora críticamente algunas de las suposiciones normativas de los estudios comparativos feministas sobre el Estado del bienestar. Este tipo de literatura ha tenido tendencia a ofrecer una visión de la igualdad de género según el modelo de “doble sueldo” (*dual-earner model*), basándose en la

⁹⁴ *Más allá del Estado del bienestar “favorable a las mujeres”: la desigualdad de género como un problema público en las políticas en torno a los cuidados en España y Suecia.*

suposición de que la participación de las mujeres en el mercado laboral es la clave para la igualdad de género. En esta literatura se pueden encontrar representaciones excluyentes de igualdad de género, definida como igualdad sólo para madres trabajadoras blancas y heterosexuales. Así, los estudios comparativos de género y Estado de bienestar a menudo ignoran las maneras en que las políticas y los discursos del Estado privilegian a algunas mujeres y hombres frente a otros/as. Esos estudios no exploran suficientemente las diferencias entre mujeres, ni tampoco reflexionan lo suficiente acerca de las diferencias dentro de los Estados (Kantola y Dahl 2005). Tomando esta crítica como base, el análisis feminista del Estado del bienestar que se desarrolla en esta tesis permite un examen de diferentes representaciones, dominantes y marginales, de desigualdad de género en las políticas referentes al trabajo doméstico y de cuidados. El análisis que aquí se presenta examina las suposiciones normativas inherentes a las representaciones dominantes del problema (Bustelo y Lombardo 2007; Verloo 2007; Bacchi 1999). En vez de considerar los Estados del bienestar nórdicos como esencialmente “favorables a las mujeres” y los Estados del bienestar del Sur de Europa como fundamentalmente “desfavorables para las mujeres”, se hace hincapié en que, dependiendo de cómo las políticas definen y construyen el género y la desigualdad de género en contextos específicos, éstas pueden tener efectos de empoderamiento y/o desempoderamiento sobre mujeres –y hombres.

La investigación se guía por la siguiente cuestión: ¿Cómo se construye la desigualdad de género en las políticas en torno a los cuidados? Con el fin de abordar esta cuestión, se han desarrollado varias cuestiones adicionales:

4. ¿Cómo se articula la desigualdad como un problema público en los Estados del bienestar español y sueco?
5. ¿Cuáles son las suposiciones normativas y los silencios implícitos en estas representaciones del problema?
6. ¿Qué suposiciones normativas se comparten entre los distintos países? ¿Cuáles son las diferencias y los silencios vinculados al contexto?

El propósito de la primera cuestión es explorar la construcción de la desigualdad de género como un problema público en las políticas en torno a los cuidados en España y Suecia y, de ese modo, examinar los vínculos entre el género y el Estado del bienestar en diferentes contextos. La segunda cuestión aborda las suposiciones normativas implícitas en las representaciones del problema y las soluciones que se ofrecen. Los relatos dominantes y sus silencios están en el centro de atención con el fin de revelar los sujetos normativos de las políticas de igualdad de género y los procesos de exclusión. La tercera cuestión tiene la intención de comparar los estudios de caso español y sueco, examinando qué suposiciones normativas se comparten entre estos países y cuáles son los silencios en cada contexto nacional. La comparación de los estudios de caso es útil para poder entender mejor cómo se formula la desigualdad de género en el contexto de unos Estados del bienestar europeos en constante cambio.

Marco teórico

Esta tesis pretende contribuir a nuestro entendimiento del género y el Estado del bienestar en el contexto europeo. El estudio se sitúa dentro de la investigación feminista sobre el Estado del bienestar, literatura a la que tengo intención de contribuir. ¿Cómo se pueden usar, y desarrollar, las existentes perspectivas de la investigación feminista sobre el Estado del bienestar para analizar la relación entre la desigualdad de género y las políticas en torno a los cuidados? Con el fin de abordar esta cuestión, el marco teórico examina la representación de la (des)igualdad de género en la literatura sobre género y Estado del bienestar.

Los estudios feministas sobre el bienestar a menudo, implícita o explícitamente, proponen un determinado tipo de Estado del bienestar como normativo. Los modelos considerados como más favorables a las mujeres son aquellos en los que el Estado asume en gran medida la responsabilidad de provisión de cuidados, como, por ejemplo, el modelo de “doble sueldo” (*dual earner model*) (Lewis 1992), el modelo nórdico de “cuidados públicos” (*Nordic model of social care*) (Anttonen 2005), el modelo de “sustentador-cuidador” (*earner-carer model*) (Sainsbury 1999) y el “Estado implicado en los cuidados” (*caring state*) (Daly 2001). La política social se ha concebido como el núcleo de las políticas favorables a las mujeres (Kantola y Dahl 2005; Hobson 2004; Anttonen 2002; Sörensen y Bergqvist 2002). La investigación comparativa dominante y la feminista sobre el Estado del bienestar convergen en que en los países donde el Estado convierte de manera eficaz el deber “privado” de cuidados en una “responsabilidad pública”, las condiciones para el desarrollo de plena ciudadanía civil, política y social de las mujeres se cumplen mucho mejor (Bussemaker y Kees van Kersbergen 2000). La visión del Estado del bienestar favorable a las mujeres ha llegado a referirse, en buena medida, a las posibilidades de compaginar el trabajo y los cuidados. En esta línea, los Estados del bienestar nórdicos a menudo se han representado como los más favorables para las mujeres.

Tal y como han demostrado las investigaciones feministas críticas del Estado del bienestar, la idea normativa de los Estados del bienestar favorables a las mujeres se basa en una visión de los intereses de las mujeres como comunes y colectivos, y esencialmente diferentes de los intereses de los hombres (Borchorst y Siim 2002). La investigación sobre género y Estado del bienestar ha tenido tendencia a afirmar que el Estado contribuye a emancipar o liberar a todas las mujeres de la misma manera, lo que significa que las mujeres se representan como una categoría homogénea. La idea del Estado del bienestar favorable a las mujeres supone un Estado no represor y privilegia la política social como un mecanismo para producir igualdad (Kantola y Dahl 2005). La igualdad de género se asocia con la igualdad para madres trabajadoras blancas y heterosexuales (Kantola 2006; Hobson 2004). El Estado del bienestar favorable a las mujeres muy a menudo está relacionado con la igualdad como “inclusión” (Squires 1999) y se basa en la norma del modelo de “doble sueldo” en que tanto mujeres como hombres son trabajadores asalariados. Por consiguiente, el enfoque defiende la premisa de la participación de las mujeres en el mercado laboral como clave para la igualdad de género. Se puede argumentar que la asociación del trabajo remunerado con la emancipación, la autonomía, la realización personal y la posibilidad de libre elección refleja la experiencia de mujeres relativamente privilegiadas (Barker 2005). Dado que la categoría “mujeres” se

entiende como una categoría homogénea, y el análisis de género como una comparación entre mujeres y hombres (Daly y Rake 2003; Daly 2000b), los estudios comparativos sobre género y Estado del bienestar a menudo han pasado por alto las implicaciones de la “interseccionalidad”.

Mi argumento es que la interseccionalidad contribuye no sólo al análisis crítico de las suposiciones sobre un Estado del bienestar favorable a las mujeres, sino también al análisis de las suposiciones sobre el Estado del bienestar desfavorable para las mujeres. El fuerte modelo de varón sustentador, a menudo relacionado con el Estado del bienestar del Sur de Europa, también se basa en normas excluyentes. Considera que el problema de desigualdad de género es principalmente un problema de madres blancas y heterosexuales de clases medias y altas. Las normas de “varón sustentador” y “mujer cuidadora” se pueden entender como ideales que principalmente corresponden a familias relativamente acomodadas. Las mujeres pobres y de clase trabajadora siempre han tenido que participar en trabajos generadores de ingresos en el mercado laboral formal u informal. Las políticas públicas a menudo han privilegiado a mujeres blancas de clase media alentándolas a ser madres que se quedan en casa, mientras negaban ese apoyo a mujeres inmigrantes y de clase trabajadora (O'Connor, Orloff and Shaver 1999; Williams 1995). Esta valoración crítica del análisis feminista del Estado del bienestar es útil, ya que contribuye a elaborar el enfoque analítico sobre las suposiciones normativas y los silencios que forman la base para la aproximación interseccional al análisis del Estado del bienestar en este estudio.

Mientras que los cuidados y el trabajo doméstico a menudo se han entendido como una carga común impuesta a las mujeres por el patriarcado, y los estudios feministas sobre el Estado del bienestar principalmente se han centrado en el trabajo doméstico y de cuidados no remunerado de las mujeres en la familia, las investigaciones sobre las “cadenas globales de cuidados” han planteado preguntas sobre las diferentes formas de desigualdad social y las divisiones entre las mujeres en la economía globalizada de cuidados (Ehrenreich y Hochschild 2003; Salazar Parreñas 2001; Anderson 2000). Que los cuidados y el trabajo doméstico engloben las categorías de género, clase y raza/etnia no es un fenómeno nuevo, tal y como lo revelan los estudiosos poscoloniales (Lewis 2006). Sin embargo, el fenómeno de las “cadenas globales de cuidados”, en las que hay demanda de mano de obra barata de inmigrantes por parte de hogares de renta media y alta que aspiran a compaginar el empleo y la vida familiar, refuerza la necesidad de un enfoque interseccional sobre la política social (Kvist y Peterson 2010; Lutz 2002). Las perspectivas que surgen de la literatura sobre las cadenas globales de cuidados tienen implicaciones para el análisis del Estado del bienestar que desarrollo, ya que motivan la inclusión en el análisis del debate sobre el trabajo doméstico (de cuidados) remunerado como contrapunto a los temas más tradicionales de cuidados de hijos y de personas mayores. Los estudios sobre el trabajo femenino de cuidados no remunerado en el hogar (por ejemplo, en la investigación sobre género y Estado del bienestar), y sobre el trabajo doméstico de (cuidados) remunerado de las mujeres (por ejemplo, en la literatura sobre las cadenas globales de cuidados), muy rara vez se complementan (Anderson 2000). Al haber notado esta falta de convergencia, esta tesis pone frente a frente ambas literaturas. También argumento que las teorías sobre las cadenas globales de cuidados no prestan suficiente atención al papel del Estado en la articulación de posiciones, significados y valores del trabajo doméstico remunerado. Reconociendo la importancia de los estudios

que analizan las experiencias y las voces de las trabajadoras domésticas, argumento que una perspectiva “desde arriba hacia abajo” es útil pues explora las maneras en que el Estado, a través de sus políticas públicas, modela la organización social de los cuidados y la posición de las trabajadoras domésticas, por ejemplo, construyendo a las trabajadoras domésticas como una solución legítima a los problemas relativos a la “conciliación de la vida laboral y familiar”.

En resumidas cuentas, un análisis feminista del Estado del bienestar necesita tener en cuenta la interseccionalidad por varias razones. En primer lugar, la interseccionalidad se ha hecho fundamental para cualquier comprensión de género a través de diferentes desarrollos dentro de la teoría feminista. En segundo lugar, se ha demostrado que los estudios sobre género y Estado del bienestar a menudo presentan una visión excluyente de la igualdad de género definida como igualdad sólo para madres trabajadoras blancas y heterosexuales. En tercer lugar, la literatura sobre las cadenas globales de cuidados revela la necesidad de problematizar cualquier categoría unitaria de “mujeres” en relación a los cuidados y al trabajo doméstico, dada la interconexión entre el género, la raza/etnia y la clase en la economía globalizada. El adoptar el concepto de interseccionalidad ha significado colocar en el centro a los sujetos que actualmente se encuentran marginados. No obstante, no debería considerarse que las categorías sociales sólo cuentan para los/las marginados/as, el “otro”/ la “otra”; también cuentan como condiciones para los/las privilegiados/as (Staunæs 2003). La interseccionalidad está relacionada con cuestionar el sujeto normativo del feminismo (Brah y Phoenix 2004), o de las políticas de igualdad de género. En este aspecto es muy útil el concepto de Kimberly Crenshaw (1991) de interseccionalidad política. Se refiere a cómo las desigualdades y sus intersecciones son importantes a nivel de las políticas públicas. Crenshaw demuestra que tanto las políticas para combatir la discriminación racial como las políticas de discriminación sexual han tenido tendencia a marginar las experiencias de las mujeres de color privilegiando a las mujeres blancas y a los hombres de color respectivamente. Este análisis presta atención a las maneras en que las políticas de igualdad de género privilegian a determinados grupos de mujeres (y hombres) frente a otros.

Las políticas de provisión de cuidados, por lo general, pueden considerarse favorables a las mujeres en términos de que facilitan a las mujeres ser madres y asumir el papel de hijas de sus padres mayores y, al mismo tiempo, tener trabajo remunerado. No obstante, las políticas en torno a los cuidados no se pueden interpretar como si fueran de empoderamiento automático para las mujeres (Kantola y Dahl 2005). Mi argumento es que el Estado del bienestar no puede considerarse *a priori* “favorable” o “desfavorable para las mujeres”, sino que los estudios empíricos pueden revelar cómo las políticas públicas específicas construyen el género, y la desigualdad de género, y nos ayudan a interpretar sus efectos sobre mujeres y hombres. Dependiendo de las maneras en que las políticas construyen los significados de género, y las categorías de clase, raza/etnia y sexualidad, pueden considerarse potencialmente favorables o desfavorables para las mujeres. El análisis demuestra de esa manera cómo las políticas relacionadas con los cuidados, que normalmente intentan mejorar la igualdad de género, pueden marginar a “otras” mujeres. El punto de partida aquí es que la categoría “mujeres” es tanto normativa como excluyente y se la invoca frecuentemente sin poner en duda los privilegios de clase o raza (Butler 1990). El género se constituye de manera diferente en diferentes contextos y momentos históricos. Por consiguiente, esta tesis explora las maneras en que el género

y la igualdad de género se producen discursivamente en los debates políticos relativos a los cuidados y al trabajo doméstico en los contextos específicos de España y Suecia. En lugar de aceptar la existencia de un Estado del bienestar favorable (o desfavorable) a las mujeres en términos generales, estoy más interesada en la exploración de las maneras en que los debates políticos construyen, o no, el Estado del bienestar como favorable a las mujeres.

Metodología

Como investigadora no me puedo posicionar fuera de las representaciones que aquí se exponen y, por lo tanto, no intento adoptar una posición objetiva, contando la “verdad” sobre qué es “realmente” la (des)igualdad de género (Rönnblom 2005) o cuál es el “mejor” tipo de Estado del bienestar. Por ende, el propósito no es examinar de manera objetiva una hipótesis teórica, sino usar el marco teórico como una fuente de inspiración para identificar las cuestiones críticas y desarrollar las herramientas analíticas para analizar el material empírico (Dahl 2000). La igualdad de género no es algo que simplemente “es” de un modo no problemático, sino algo que se puede entender y presentar de muchas maneras diferentes, cada una con consecuencias diferentes (Magnusson, Rönnblom y Silius 2008). Yo estudio las políticas de igualdad de género, no con el fin de evaluar de manera objetiva su fracaso o éxito, sino para examinar de manera crítica las representaciones del problema, sus suposiciones normativas y silencios subyacentes. El propósito es analizar la manera en que se produce la desigualdad de género como un problema público y en la que, de ese modo, adquiere determinados significados mientras que otros se quedan ocultos.

El enfoque social constructivista que manejo se inspira, en gran parte, en el enfoque de Carol Bacchi de *What's the problem represented to be?*⁹⁵ (1999). Este enfoque se basa en la suposición de que no existen problemas públicos objetivos y que las “verdades” se construyen dentro del discurso. Además, los discursos tienen importantes efectos materiales e inmateriales. Se pueden descubrir ideas diferentes sobre cuál es el problema si nos hacemos preguntas complementarias sobre quién se considera responsable del problema, cuáles son las causas y los efectos del problema, y qué soluciones se proponen para resolverlo. Los silencios en la agenda política son significativos para el análisis, dado que dicen algo sobre lo que se excluye o margina. Siguiendo esta pauta, analizo diferentes representaciones de desigualdad de género en la agenda y presto atención a lo que permanece sin ser cuestionado. El enfoque define la política como discurso y los discursos pueden considerarse como sistemas de pensamientos compuestos de ideas, creencias y prácticas (Lessa 2006). El proceso de construcción de problemas públicos se representa como un proceso de formulación; no obstante, el enfoque se centra en las suposiciones normativas subyacentes en lugar de considerar que los discursos se usan intencionadamente por diferentes actores con fines específicos. Los efectos del discurso pueden estar relacionados con las maneras en que los sujetos se constituyen en el discurso. Por consiguiente, el análisis presta atención a las maneras en que los discursos privilegian determinadas posiciones de sujeto y marginan otras.

⁹⁵ ¿Cuál es el problema y su representación?

El análisis se propone revelar y examinar los discursos dominantes sobre género. El feminismo ha cuestionado a menudo los discursos androcéntricos creando espacios para discursos marginales y revelando las maneras en que las mujeres se posicionan como la “otra” mientras que el varón se construye como la norma. Sin embargo, el feminismo y la investigación feminista también contribuyen a la creación de determinadas realidades mientras marginan otras. Como ya se ha visto, los estudios comparativos feministas sobre el Estado del bienestar han creado un discurso que define el problema de desigualdad de género como un problema para madres trabajadoras blancas y heterosexuales. El análisis se inspira en el trabajo de Nancy Fraser sobre el género y el Estado del bienestar (1989), que hace hincapié en las suposiciones normativas inherentes a las políticas sociales. Como Fraser afirma, este enfoque proporciona un marco a las feministas para intervenir de modo significativo en los debates sobre el gasto social y la reestructuración del Estado del bienestar. También me parecen útiles para el análisis las investigaciones críticas que cuestionan la formulación de la igualdad de género como algo esencialmente vinculado a las normas que se dan por sentadas como, por ejemplo, el crecimiento económico, el progreso y la modernidad (Rönnblom 2009, Mohammad 2005, Towns 2002).

Los discursos dominantes sobre género se examinan por medio de un análisis textual de documentos de políticas públicas. Los textos políticos se seleccionaron de acuerdo con su relevancia en lo que se refiere a la articulación de la desigualdad de género como un problema público y al tratamiento de importantes cambios en las políticas públicas. Forman parte de estos documentos leyes, proposiciones de ley, debates parlamentarios, planes e informes sobre políticas. El análisis textual recurre al Análisis Crítico de Marcos desarrollado dentro de los dos proyectos de investigación europeos en los que he participado: MAGEEQ y QUING (<http://www.quing.eu>; <http://www.mageeq.net>; www.proyectomageeq.org). El punto de partida es el hecho de que hay varias maneras de formular la desigualdad de género como un problema y de que, de esta forma, hay diferentes visiones de la igualdad de género integradas en las representaciones del problema (Lombardo, Meier y Verloo 2009; Bustelo y Lombardo 2007; Verloo y Lombardo 2007). Tomando como base la guía para el análisis textual (*sensitizing questions*) desarrollada dentro de los proyectos de investigación, la he adaptado a este estudio particular. El análisis textual presta especial atención a las dimensiones de diagnóstico (representaciones del problema) y pronóstico (soluciones proporcionadas), género e interseccionalidad, ubicación (responsabilidad privada y pública, estatal y familiar) y voz (posiciones de sujeto normativas, voces legítimas y exclusión). El análisis de los distintos análisis de texto ha identificado los discursos dominantes relativos a la (des)igualdad de género, prestando atención a las suposiciones normativas subyacentes y a los silencios.

Estudios de caso

El estudio analiza y compara los debates políticos relacionados con los cuidados y el trabajo doméstico en un Estado del bienestar del Sur de Europa, España, y en un Estado del bienestar nórdico, Suecia, en el periodo 1995 (año de la IV Conferencia Mundial de la Mujer en Pekín) y 2010.

Los cuidados es un asunto relativamente reciente en la agenda política en España, pero desde 1995 se ha convertido en un tema de amplio debate en relación con los problemas de “conciliación de vida laboral y familiar” y de “dependencia”. Estos dos debates políticos se analizan en el estudio de caso español. Las investigadoras feministas muy a menudo han hecho hincapié en el carácter familista del Estado del bienestar español y, así, en las maneras en que el Estado del bienestar español atribuye un papel clave al trabajo doméstico y de cuidados no remunerado de las mujeres (Threlfall, Cousins and Valiente 2005; Carrasco et al. 1997). Al mismo tiempo, España se ha desplazado desde un fuerte modelo de “varón sustentador” hacia un modelo de “doble sueldo” en el contexto de la cada vez mayor participación de las mujeres en el mercado laboral (por lo menos, hasta la crisis económica), el envejecimiento de la población y los nuevos patrones de migración. La investigación feminista indica que, en lugar de la provisión pública de cuidados, todavía predominan las soluciones individuales y privadas, aunque de índole cambiante. Por ejemplo, algunos estudios hacen hincapié en el papel fundamental de las trabajadoras domésticas inmigrantes en el trabajo de cuidado de niños y cuidado de personas mayores (Martínez Buján 2007; Tobío 2005). Se puede argumentar que el fenómeno de las “cadenas globales de cuidados” es más significativo en los contextos de Europa del Sur que en los nórdicos, dado que en los primeros la provisión pública de cuidados escasea. El estudio de caso español analiza el asunto del “servicio doméstico” como un tercer debate; un debate político que ha sido marginal a pesar de los esfuerzos de las organizaciones de las trabajadoras domésticas y del movimiento feminista para incluir las demandas de este colectivo en la agenda política. Aunque se incluyan referencias al periodo de la crisis económica, el análisis se centra fundamentalmente en el periodo en que se desarrollaron las políticas sociales relativas a los asuntos de conciliación y dependencia, hasta 2008. Si bien se trata de un tema muy importante para futuros estudios, el impacto sobre el Estado del bienestar y la desigualdad de género de los recortes generales del gasto social a causa de la crisis económica está fuera del alcance de este estudio.

En Suecia la igualdad de género se ha construido como parte de la identidad nacional, queriendo dar ejemplo a otros países y a la Unión Europea, en particular en los asuntos relacionados con la conciliación de la vida laboral y familiar (Hobson, Lewis y Siim 2002; Towns 2002). El Estado del bienestar nórdico se ha caracterizado por tener un modelo de “doble sueldo” o modelo de “sustentador-cuidador” (Sainsbury 1999), en el que tanto las mujeres como los hombres tienen derecho a ser cuidadores y sustentadores. Las políticas que facilitan la conciliación de la vida laboral y familiar y proporcionan cuidados a personas mayores tienen una tradición relativamente larga en Suecia. Una amplia política social se ha dirigido hacia todos los estratos de la población sobre la base de la ciudadanía (Bergqvist et al. 1999). Estas políticas incluyen permisos parentales y bajas por maternidad/paternidad flexibles y extensos, una amplia oferta de servicios públicos de cuidado de niños y una extensa provisión pública de cuidado de personas mayores (Szebehely 2005). El servicio doméstico en hogares particulares es una práctica mucho más común en España que en Suecia. Sin embargo, ha sido muy debatida en Suecia y no en España. Las investigaciones han relacionado la expansión del mercado de servicios domésticos en Suecia desde los años 90 con los recortes en el Estado del bienestar. El debate político sobre el “servicio doméstico”, a menudo llamado el “debate sobre las criadas” (*pigdebatten*), surgió a mediados de los años 90 (Kvist y Peterson

2010; Platzer 2007; Gavanas 2006). Giraba en torno a la cuestión de si los servicios domésticos deberían ser subvencionados por el Estado; una ley de desgravación fiscal por servicios domésticos se aprobó finalmente en 2007 con la coalición de centro-derecha en el gobierno⁹⁶. El estudio de caso sueco está más limitado en su alcance que el español en términos de centrarse en el debate en torno al servicio doméstico y en términos del material analizado (sobre todo se centra en los debates parlamentarios). Sin embargo, el debate sueco proporciona un contraste interesante al estudio de caso español en cuanto convierte el servicio doméstico en un asunto polémico de desigualdad de género, con un prolongado debate en el parlamento. Además, revela las representaciones del problema de desigualdad de género que apenas aparecen en el contexto español, ya que el debate ante todo trata de la intersección de género y clase.

Dada la preponderancia de la investigación comparativa cuantitativa y positivista, las comparaciones cualitativas y orientadas hacia el discurso han sido marginales, incluyendo la investigación comparativa sobre género y Estado del bienestar. Aunque se han criticado los estudios comparativos por hacer comparaciones cuando los conceptos tienen significados diferentes en contextos diferentes, las diferencias entre países en los significados de desigualdad de género aquí se toman como punto de partida. Además, este estudio analiza las diferentes formas de cuidados pero, a diferencia los intentos de formular una noción de cuidados coherente y global (Daly y Lewis 1999; Thomas 1993) considero que los debates relativos a los cuidados son múltiples y contradictorios y están relacionados con el contexto.

La tesis recurre a literatura sobre género y regímenes de Estado del bienestar para argumentar que sí es interesante comparar España y Suecia, ya que a menudo se toman como representantes de modelos de Estado del bienestar opuestos en el contexto europeo y, como tales, representarían un modelo favorable a las mujeres y un modelo desfavorable para las mujeres respectivamente. No obstante, el análisis pone en entredicho los estudios que elaboran tipologías y amplias generalizaciones y establecen un tipo específico de Estado del bienestar como el ideal. Combino un análisis empírico exhaustivo, que reconoce la complejidad de cada caso, con un análisis comparativo de las diferencias y similitudes entre estos Estados. No se trata de analizar el caso español en términos de compararlo con un modelo ideal; más bien definiendo que el estudio de caso sueco proporciona un contraste útil para resaltar las suposiciones normativas y los silencios en la agenda española, y viceversa. El enfoque comparativo ayuda a identificar tanto los discursos dominantes como lo que no se problematiza en cada contexto nacional. En general, los estudios de caso contrastados sirven para ilustrar el problema de desigualdad de género en el contexto de los Estados del bienestar europeos.

Resultados I: la desigualdad de género como un problema público en las políticas españolas en torno a los cuidados

En esta sección presentaré los principales resultados del estudio de caso español. El análisis se ha centrado en la formulación de la desigualdad de género como un problema

⁹⁶ Ley 2007: 346 de crédito fiscal por servicios domésticos, que establece el derecho a la desgravación de impuestos del 50% del coste del servicio (máximo 5,000 Euros y mínimo 50 Euros al año).

dentro de tres debates políticos: la conciliación de la vida laboral y familiar, la dependencia y el servicio doméstico.

Cuando el asunto de la *conciliación de la vida laboral y familiar* apareció en la agenda durante el gobierno del Partido Popular a finales de los años 90, se formuló como un asunto de madres trabajadoras. Se consideraba que las mujeres deberían tener hijos pero, al mismo tiempo, que su lugar estaba en el mercado laboral. Un elemento importante en el discurso político fue el énfasis en la participación de las mujeres en el mercado laboral como la clave para la igualdad de género. El discurso dominante sobre la igualdad de género hacía hincapié en el crecimiento económico, la modernización y la norma de la igualdad como “inclusión”: las mujeres deberían integrarse en el mercado de trabajo formal en igualdad de condiciones que los hombres, pero no se cuestionan las normas masculinas del dicho mercado. Al compaginar la carrera profesional y el cuidado de hijos/as las madres trabajadoras modernas se convirtieron en el sujeto legítimo de la igualdad de género y en el símbolo de progreso. Las políticas de conciliación privilegiaban a mujeres con empleo formal, excluyendo así a determinados grupos: a mujeres desempleadas y las que trabajaban en el sector informal, a menudo mujeres de clase trabajadora e inmigrantes. El reconocer el problema de la desigual distribución de las responsabilidades de cuidados y trabajo doméstico entre mujeres y hombres contrastaba con la falta de medidas políticas dirigidas a los hombres. Además, la formulación de la conciliación como la clave para la igualdad de género contrastaba con la suposición normativa de responsabilidad familiar de cuidados y con el discurso sobre la libertad de elección de las familias y la solidaridad intergeneracional, que más bien (re)producía la división del trabajo en función del género. Mientras se fomentaba un modelo de “doble sueldo”, las soluciones eran predominantemente individuales, no colectivas. La familia heterosexual era una norma incontestable en este debate, ya que se suponía que las familias se constituían por un hombre y una mujer, una madre y un padre.

Durante el gobierno Socialista (2004-) la conciliación de la vida personal, familiar y laboral ha sido un asunto destacado. Las “madres trabajadoras” han seguido siendo sujetos legítimos de estas políticas y, por lo tanto, de la igualdad de género. No obstante, el enfoque se extendió a los padres y se introdujo la norma de “corresponsabilidad”. En la Ley de Igualdad (3/2007) la corresponsabilidad se refiere al compartir los cuidados y el trabajo doméstico entre mujeres y hombres, lo que se considera clave para conseguir la igualdad de género, y la nueva baja por paternidad se ha celebrado como una medida innovadora. La igualdad de género ha seguido situada dentro de un discurso que promueve el crecimiento económico y el empleo, y que defiende “la igualdad de oportunidades” en el mercado laboral y la “empleabilidad” de las mujeres: la adaptación de las mujeres a los requisitos del mercado laboral, no al revés. No obstante, el problema de conciliación se considera un asunto de interés público y el Estado tiene la responsabilidad de proporcionar las soluciones. El Plan Estratégico de Igualdad de Oportunidades (2008-11) amplió la idea de corresponsabilidad desde el compartir los cuidados y el trabajo doméstico entre mujeres y hombres hasta la corresponsabilidad social que incluía la responsabilidad del Estado de conceder derechos, proporcionar los servicios de cuidados y promover la responsabilidad corporativa. Al mismo tiempo, el concepto de “obligaciones familiares” seguía siendo una noción común. Teniendo en cuenta la crisis económica, es muy probable que las soluciones individuales y los cuidados familiares sean reforzados en un futuro próximo.

En general, la igualdad de género se ha asociado a la participación de las mujeres en el mercado laboral. En nombre de la emancipación femenina y del crecimiento económico, se ha valorado cada vez más el trabajo remunerado (Williams 2010; Fraser 2009). Esta visión de la igualdad de género implica la negación de desigualdad de clase. La asociación del trabajo remunerado con el éxito y la emancipación eclipsa los problemas de segregación sexual, discriminación y condiciones laborales precarias en la vida laboral. Desde la aparición del asunto de la conciliación de la vida laboral y familiar en la agenda, el debate político ha producido una imagen homogénea de las “mujeres”, suponiendo que todas las mujeres comparten los mismos problemas e intereses en cuanto a los dilemas de cuidados y trabajo. El sujeto normativo implícito en los debates sobre la conciliación de la vida laboral y familiar son mujeres autóctonas, blancas, heterosexuales y de clase media y alta. El trabajo académico ha resaltado la manera en que los Estados del bienestar del Sur de Europa dependen del trabajo doméstico de cuidados remunerado proporcionado por trabajadoras inmigrantes. Las trabajadoras inmigrantes generalmente han estado marginadas en el debate y cuando aparecen, se las representa como la “otra”, una categoría homogénea de mujeres oprimidas que contrasta con las mujeres autóctonas modernas. Por lo general, los problemas de las trabajadoras inmigrantes que facilitan la conciliación de la vida laboral y familiar de las mujeres y los hombres españoles han sido ignorados.

La Ley de Dependencia aprobada en 2006 ha colocado el cuidado de las personas en situación de dependencia en la agenda política en España y ha asignado la responsabilidad al Estado de proporcionar el cuidado a estas personas. Un nuevo derecho de la ciudadanía, supuestamente universal, se adoptó con el fin de garantizar un mínimo estándar nacional en el cuidado de personas en situación de dependencia. Encontrar soluciones para el cuidado de las personas en situación de dependencia se ha representado como uno de los mayores retos de los países desarrollados. El debate relativo a la dependencia ha construido el problema como una cuestión de que las personas en situación de dependencia reciban cuidado, quedando las cuidadoras en la sombra. Aunque la reforma ha visibilizado el cuidado como un problema público, también ha marginado los asuntos relacionados con los derechos de las cuidadoras, sus salarios y las condiciones laborales. El cuidado de personas mayores ha sido en gran medida desvinculado del problema de desigualdad de género y la construcción del cuidado como trabajo femenino no se ha tenido en cuenta. En este sentido, el debate relativo a la dependencia se diferencia claramente del debate sobre la conciliación de la vida laboral y familiar. La Ley de Dependencia se ha articulado en términos supuestamente neutrales en cuanto al género, refiriéndose a los cuidadores en su forma masculina.

Sin embargo, el entonces Ministro de Trabajo y Asuntos Sociales justificó la reforma legal calificándola como un proyecto de igualdad de género que proporcionaría a las mujeres mayores oportunidades en el mercado laboral y posibilidades de conciliar la vida laboral y familiar. En esta línea, la representación de la (des)igualdad de género en el debate sobre la dependencia coincidió con el debate sobre la conciliación de la vida laboral y familiar. Apareció una visión del Estado del bienestar como favorable a las mujeres en el sentido de que el Estado ayudaría a liberar a las mujeres de los cuidados y permitirles trabajar. Además, el Plan Estratégico de Igualdad de Oportunidades se refiere a la nueva política sobre dependencia como a una política de igualdad de género que

reconoce a las cuidadoras y fomenta la profesionalización de los cuidados. No obstante, los precarios subsidios para los cuidados familiares previstos en la Ley de Dependencia y la ausencia en el debate de la categoría de trabajadoras domésticas son claros indicios de la marginación de estas trabajadoras. El movimiento feminista ha criticado el subsidio familiar por reproducir los cuidados como trabajo femenino, al que se otorga muy poco valor. Mientras que, por una parte, el empleo de trabajadoras domésticas para el cuidado de personas mayores es una práctica frecuente en el Estado del bienestar español, por otra, la categoría de trabajadoras domésticas ha estado ausente en la Ley de Dependencia y en los debates parlamentarios. En general, el creciente papel del Estado en la provisión de cuidados ha supuesto un alejamiento de la visión dominante de cuidado de personas mayores como un asunto casi exclusivamente familiar, construyendo los cuidados como un problema público, pero la norma de responsabilidad estatal coexiste con un constante enfoque a los cuidados familiares, las soluciones del mercado y el tercer sector.

La existencia de un *Régimen Especial de Empleados del Hogar*, establecido en 1985, ofrece un marco importante para el debate *servicio doméstico*, ya que este régimen de la Seguridad Social proporciona mucha menos protección social a los/las trabajadores/as que el sistema del Régimen General de la Seguridad Social. De hecho, la Comisión Europea ha censurado el *Régimen Especial de Empleados del Hogar* por infringir la Directiva Europea sobre igualdad de trato entre hombres y mujeres y, en particular, la Directiva 79/7/EEC sobre igualdad de trato en el sistema de la Seguridad Social. Recientemente, el gobierno Socialista ha conseguido un acuerdo con los sindicatos UGT y CCOO para mejorar el estatus de las trabajadoras domésticas e integrar el Régimen Especial en el Régimen General, por lo que parece haber comenzado una reforma en este sentido. Sin embargo, a pesar de la importancia de las trabajadoras domésticas en la provisión de cuidados y el estatus especialmente precario de la trabajadora doméstica en el Régimen Especial no ha habido mucho debate en torno al tema del servicio doméstico. Consecuentemente, el trabajo doméstico remunerado ha sido un asunto marginal en la agenda política en España.

El análisis del servicio doméstico se centra especialmente en un debate parlamentario de 2005 que convirtió los derechos de las trabajadoras domésticas en el tema central. El sistema de la Seguridad Social sin duda ha construido el trabajo doméstico remunerado como “diferente” de los tipos normales de trabajo. El carácter diferente del trabajo doméstico se enfatiza de maneras diferentes en dicho debate parlamentario sobre los derechos de las trabajadoras domésticas, desde resaltar la servidumbre inherente de este trabajo hasta afirmar que su carácter imposibilita su regulación. En este debate se vincula el carácter diferente del trabajo a las desigualdades y la discriminación basadas en género y clase. También se discute la posición particularmente vulnerable de las trabajadoras inmigrantes, refiriéndose a la falta de sus derechos laborales y su mayor presencia en los puestos de trabajo que tienen muy poco valor social. No obstante, este debate se ha articulado en relación a la cuestión de encontrar soluciones a los problemas de conciliación de las familias españolas. Además, los derechos de las trabajadoras domésticas se han situado en un discurso neo-liberal, en que se privilegia el crecimiento económico y el empleo. En resumen, al privilegiar la conciliación, la calidad de vida de las familias de clase media, la estabilidad económica y el empleo, el discurso político ha marginado a las trabajadoras domésticas como sujetos. El análisis demuestra que el servicio doméstico se ha construido como una solución

privada viable en el contexto del limitado Estado del bienestar. Incluso puede considerarse que la amplia aceptación de esas soluciones privadas justifica la falta de responsabilidad del Estado, reforzando la legitimidad del Estado no responsable en la provisión de cuidados.

Cuando el servicio doméstico ha aparecido en la agenda se ha articulado normalmente como un asunto de derechos laborales. En contraste, el servicio doméstico prácticamente nunca se vincula al problema de desigualdad de género y a las políticas de igualdad. En cambio, los debates políticos relativos al trabajo doméstico y de cuidados normalmente se centran en el problema de conciliación de la vida laboral y familiar donde la desigualdad de género se vincula al trabajo doméstico y de cuidados *no remunerado* de las mujeres. Se presta muy poca atención al asunto del trabajo doméstico de cuidados *remunerados*. La perpetuación de la división sexual del trabajo, siguiendo las líneas de clase, raza/etnia y nacionalidad, mediante el traspaso del trabajo de cuidados y del trabajo doméstico de las mujeres y los hombres españoles a “otras” mujeres casi nunca se ha cuestionado o puesto en entredicho. En los debates sobre la “conciliación” y la “dependencia” la figura de la trabajadora doméstica ha sido ignorada casi por completo. En otras palabras, las trabajadoras domésticas son las “otras” invisibles en las políticas de igualdad de género españolas.

Resultados II: la desigualdad de género como un problema público en las políticas suecas en torno a los cuidados

A continuación, presentaré los resultados principales del estudio de caso sueco. El análisis se ha centrado en la formulación de la desigualdad de género como un problema público dentro del debate sobre el servicio doméstico. Este debate ha girado en torno a la cuestión de si el Estado debería subvencionar los servicios domésticos, pero también se articula como vinculado al problema de conciliar la vida laboral y familiar, y al de la dependencia/cuidado de mayores.

El *servicio doméstico* definitivamente se ha construido como fuertemente ligado al problema de la desigualdad de género en Suecia. Todos han estado de acuerdo en que el empleo es la clave para la igualdad de género. No obstante, hay una clara división entre la izquierda y la derecha en este asunto: la izquierda recalca el problema de desigualdades de género y clase integradas en el trabajo doméstico remunerado, mientras que la derecha hace hincapié en los servicios domésticos como la clave para la igualdad de género, pues liberan a las mujeres del trabajo no remunerado y les permiten dedicar más tiempo a sus carreras profesionales. Los partidos de izquierda han rechazado con ímpetu los subsidios públicos para los servicios domésticos y, aunque consideran que el empleo es la clave para la igualdad de género, no quieren crear más puestos de trabajo en este sector de bajos sueldos y de baja valoración social. Recelan del sector de trabajo feminizado mal remunerado y poco cualificado que se promueve a través de la desgravación fiscal por servicios domésticos. El “problema de las criadas” ha estado vinculado a las categorías de género y clase y, en menor medida, a la de etnia. La izquierda vuelve a menudo a la cuestión: ¿Quién debería ser la criada de la criada? La creación del trabajo de criadas lleva a reforzar las divisiones de clases. Esta perspectiva también ha rechazado subvencionar el sector de servicios domésticos privados aduciendo que eso supondría el

desmantelamiento del Estado del bienestar: no se puede subvencionar el trabajo doméstico en hogares de clase alta en lugar de garantizar los derechos universales. Se ha criticado la idea de promover la inserción de las mujeres inmigrantes en este sector específico, ya que puede aumentar la segregación en el mercado laboral reforzando las desigualdades relacionadas con la procedencia de las trabajadoras. Sin embargo, las trabajadoras domésticas se han marginado como sujetos debido al enfoque global sobre las desigualdades estructurales y la explotación, y también a la norma de compartir cuidados y trabajo doméstico entre hombres y mujeres. El discurso sobre las desigualdades estructurales de género, clase y etnia que juegan un papel importante en el trabajo doméstico predomina de tal manera que deja muy poco espacio para el aspecto de valorar el trabajo doméstico remunerado y construirlo como trabajo “de verdad”.

La manera que han tenido los partidos de derecha de formular la cuestión subraya que el servicio doméstico es simplemente otro trabajo. Al rechazar el término criada, se han representado como los que revalorizan el trabajo doméstico. El servicio doméstico es la clave para la igualdad tanto de empleadoras como de empleadas. Las trabajadoras domésticas liberan a las mujeres (e, implícitamente, no a los hombres) del trabajo no remunerado para que puedan pasar más tiempo en el trabajo remunerado y progresar en sus carreras profesionales en igualdad de condiciones que los hombres. La posición de las trabajadoras domésticas también mejora con la desgravación fiscal, aunque eso signifique promover el trabajo tradicional de las mujeres: las mujeres se desplazan, supuestamente, de un sector laboral informal al sector formal, y del desempleo al empleo. Así se crean oportunidades de trabajo para ciertas categorías de mujeres: mujeres con bajo nivel de educación, mujeres jóvenes y mujeres inmigrantes. Las mujeres inmigrantes tienen así su primera oportunidad de tener un trabajo de verdad y un sueldo, además de conocer a los suecos y su cultura al limpiar sus casas. En otras palabras, el servicio doméstico es la clave para la integración en la sociedad sueca. A diferencia del enfoque de la izquierda sobre las estructuras explotadoras y el compartir los cuidados y el trabajo doméstico entre hombres y mujeres, los partidos de derechas tienen tendencia a adoptar una perspectiva individualista sobre las trabajadoras domésticas a las que representan como individuos que se realizan personalmente y sienten orgullo a través del trabajo. El discurso se caracteriza por las normas de individualismo, libertad de elección y ética del trabajo, lo que deja poco espacio para los problemas de desigualdades, explotación o discriminación. A las trabajadoras domésticas, en su mayoría mujeres, se les describe como profesionales y empresarias orgullosas que hacen lo que libremente habían elegido y lo que “se les da bien”. Las trabajadoras domésticas que se convierten en empresarias y emplean a otras personas para realizar los servicios se ajustan mejor a la idea del trabajo como una historia de éxito y realización personal. En fin, hay que considerar la idea de valorar el trabajo doméstico remunerado a la luz de la ética del trabajo y la norma del crecimiento económico. Todo trabajo remunerado -formal- se considera bueno porque contribuye a la economía sueca.

Uno de los cimientos del modelo de Estado del bienestar sueco es la idea de que las personas deberían poder compaginar el trabajo con tener una familia, tanto hombres como mujeres, y nadie debería verse obligado a elegir entre trabajo y familia. El debate sobre los servicios domésticos se ha articulado como estrechamente ligado al problema de *compaginar la vida laboral y familiar*. Las mujeres y los hombres deberían poder participar en el mercado laboral en igualdad de condiciones y deberían tener las mismas

posibilidades de compaginar la vida familiar y la laboral. Todos los partidos políticos han resaltado el problema de la falta de coresponsabilidad en el trabajo doméstico y de cuidados entre mujeres y hombres, preocupados por el hecho de que las mujeres siguen siendo las principales responsables de los/las hijos/as, la casa, la limpieza, el cuidado de mayores, etc. La pareja heterosexual con hijos aparece como la norma: los cuidados y las labores de casa deberían ser una responsabilidad compartida en la familia supuestamente constituida por una mujer y un hombre con hijos. Dada la desigual división de los cuidados y el trabajo doméstico, las “madres trabajadoras” se han representado como sujetos que sufren el problema de conciliación de la vida laboral y familiar. Las voces de izquierda han hecho hincapié en la igualdad de género en términos de reparto igualitario del trabajo doméstico y de cuidados entre mujeres y hombres en el hogar. Las mujeres y los hombres no deberían externalizar este trabajo a “otras” mujeres: las mujeres inmigrantes y de clase trabajadora. Las políticas públicas y los derechos universales se consideran el medio para conseguir un reparto igualitario. Las voces de derecha argumentan a favor de aceptar la “realidad”, la diferencia basada en la división sexual del trabajo y, por consiguiente, las soluciones propuestas se centran en convertir el trabajo doméstico mayoritariamente llevado a cabo por mujeres en trabajo remunerado formal y en liberar a las madres con doble jornada laboral del trabajo doméstico no remunerado. Además, defienden firmemente la norma de la igualdad como “inclusión”: promover la liberación de las mujeres del trabajo doméstico con el fin de conseguir condiciones iguales para mujeres y hombres en el mercado laboral. La participación de las mujeres en el mercado laboral se considera, en gran medida, la clave para la igualdad de género. Las mujeres deberían poder participar en el mercado laboral al igual que los hombres. Las “mujeres de carrera” se han construido como un sujeto que se beneficia del servicio doméstico: éste ayuda a que las mujeres puedan dedicar más tiempo a desarrollar sus carreras profesionales. El servicio doméstico promueve la igualdad de género, pues así las mujeres adquieren una posición profesional más sólida y aumentan su independencia económica.

En general, el empleo y la ética del trabajo se presentan como una norma dominante. La clave para la igualdad de género es la igual participación de hombres y mujeres en el mercado laboral. La independencia económica se articula como una parte fundamental de la igualdad de género, ya que las mujeres deben mantenerse por medio del trabajo y poder vivir de sus propios salarios. Siguiendo la misma línea, el empleo también se considera la clave para la integración de los inmigrantes. No obstante, la ética del trabajo ha sido más extensamente promovida por los partidos de derecha. Ellos son los que han sugerido que una desgravación fiscal por servicios domésticos es una cuestión de crecimiento económico además de igualdad de género. La desgravación fiscal lleva a la creación de muchas nuevas oportunidades laborales, nuevas compañías aparecen en el sector, el trabajo informal se convierte en formal y la gente dedica más tiempo al trabajo remunerado. Se ha apelado a que la economía sueca necesita más horas de trabajo remuneradas, en especial si se toman en cuenta las tensiones demográficas previstas para el futuro. Asimismo, el empleo se representa no sólo como necesario para asegurar el crecimiento y la independencia económica, sino también como una parte esencial de la identidad y la dignidad de los individuos. La creación de más empleo conlleva que más personas se sentirán orgullosas de ir a trabajar.

Ha habido un amplio consenso con respecto a la idea de Suecia como de un líder internacional en la igualdad de género. El papel histórico del Estado del bienestar favorable a las mujeres en la consecución de la igualdad de género ha sido recalcado principalmente por los partidos de izquierda. El Estado del bienestar sueco ha ayudado a las mujeres a poder compaginar empleo y familia, a diferencia del resto de Europa, donde las mujeres se han visto obligadas a elegir entre trabajo e hijos/as. Se considera que el Estado del bienestar ha facilitado las altas tasas de empleo femenino, tanto por medio de oportunidades laborales en el sector público como mediante la liberación de las mujeres del trabajo doméstico y de cuidados en el hogar. Al mismo tiempo, se admite que los recortes en el Estado del bienestar han afectado a las mujeres en particular, ya que las mujeres del sector público sufren peores condiciones laborales y salarios bajos. En definitiva, el Estado del bienestar sueco ya no se considera tan favorable a las mujeres como antaño.

Los límites del Estado del bienestar se han negociado de forma particular en el asunto del *cuidado de personas mayores*. Los partidos políticos han estado de acuerdo en que, a causa de la reestructuración del Estado del bienestar, muchas personas mayores no tienen la ayuda que necesitan y que el tiempo que los familiares dedican al trabajo de cuidados ha aumentado mientras que la ayuda pública a domicilio ha disminuido. Han sido especialmente las esposas mayores y las hijas de mediana edad las que han incrementado el tiempo dedicado los cuidados. Por una parte, entre las personas mayores con un alto nivel educativo se ha producido un aumento en la contratación de servicios privados y, por otra, cuando se trata de las personas mayores con un bajo nivel educativo, normalmente aumenta la cantidad de cuidados y trabajo doméstico de los familiares y parientes.

Los partidos de izquierda y derecha han tenido ideas divergentes sobre lo que hay que hacer. La derecha hace hincapié en las soluciones del mercado: las personas mayores deben comprar los servicios que necesitan con la ayuda de una desgravación fiscal por servicios domésticos. Los servicios domésticos subvencionados facilitan la vida diaria de las personas mayores y, al mismo tiempo, alivian la presión sobre los municipios y, por ende, sobre el Estado del bienestar. La política de desgravaciones fiscales ayuda a las personas mayores que no tienen derecho a la ayuda a domicilio municipal para que puedan pagar algún servicio doméstico. Por consiguiente, aunque el Estado del bienestar no se considera suficiente, ya que las personas mayores necesitan más apoyo en su vida diaria, no se legitima un sector público más extendido sino más bien soluciones individuales y del mercado. Los críticos argumentan que el servicio doméstico subvencionado por el Estado implica la privatización del Estado del bienestar. Mientras que las familias con ingresos altos pueden permitirse pagar por los servicios domésticos proporcionados por el mercado, los cuidados familiares no remunerados aumentan entre aquellos con ingresos más bajos, o la “gente común”. Esto conlleva a mayores desigualdades de clase entre mujeres, las principales cuidadoras. De este modo, se ha hecho hincapié en la necesidad de garantizar los derechos universales invirtiendo en el cuidado de niños y el cuidado de personas mayores.

Por contraste, la “libertad de elección” es un discurso muy importante entre los partidos de centro-derecha. Desde esta perspectiva, las personas deben ser libres de decidir sobre cómo quieren gestionar el equilibrio entre trabajo, familia y tiempo libre. Mujeres y hombres deben tener las mismas posibilidades de compaginar la vida privada y

la laboral, de acuerdo con sus propios deseos y condiciones. El Estado no debe intervenir siempre, la familia es la que mejor sabe cómo distribuir el trabajo y los cuidados y debe ser libre de elegir. El individuo es capaz de tomar las mejores decisiones en términos de lo que es mejor para su familia. La norma de la igualdad de género se diluye en este discurso sobre la libertad de elección como también la perspectiva de clase.

Resultados III: perspectiva comparada

Los estudios de caso han explorado cómo la desigualdad de género se ha formulado en relación con los cuidados en España y Suecia. El análisis comparativo de los estudios de caso llama la atención sobre tres aspectos: a) el discurso dominante, compartido entre los dos países, relativo a la “conciliación de la vida laboral y familiar” con la suposición normativa de la participación de las mujeres en el mercado laboral como la clave para la igualdad de género b) las diferencias nacionales en la articulación del “servicio doméstico” como un problema, un asunto fundamental de la igualdad de género en la agenda política sueca que ha sido marginal en España, y c) la legitimación y las representaciones cambiantes del Estado del bienestar.

Reconciliación de la vida laboral y familiar: suposiciones normativas

La “conciliación de la vida laboral y familiar” se articuló como un problema importante tanto en España como en Suecia; en España se trata de un debate relativamente nuevo, mientras que en Suecia venía de largo. En los dos contextos el problema ha estado estrechamente vinculado a la desigualdad de género. Los debates operan dentro de la premisa de la participación de las mujeres en el mercado laboral como la clave para la igualdad de género. La visión dominante de la igualdad de género se caracteriza por la norma de la “inclusión”; las mujeres deben participar en el mercado laboral de la misma manera que los hombres, pero las normas androcéntricas no se ponen en entredicho (Squires 1999). El enfoque relativo a empleo y al crecimiento económico en España y Suecia puede considerarse un ejemplo de lo dominante que se ha hecho la norma del crecimiento en la política y de cómo este discurso neo-liberal ha influido sobre el objetivo de la igualdad de género (Lombardo, Meier y Verloo 2009; Rönnblom 2009). Cuando la igualdad de género se entiende en relación con el crecimiento, la participación de las mujeres en el mercado laboral parece referirse ante todo a cambiar a las mujeres con el fin de ajustarlas a los requisitos y a las expectativas del mercado laboral, tal y como se ha articulado en la idea de la “empleabilidad de las mujeres”. El papel subordinado de las mujeres en el mercado laboral remunerado a menudo se considera causado por el papel principal de la mujer en el trabajo doméstico y de cuidados no remunerado. Por esta razón, a los padres se les ha atribuido un papel importante en términos de compartir el trabajo doméstico y de cuidados con las mujeres, facilitando así la participación de las mujeres en el mercado. La familia heterosexual con hijos a menudo ha sido la norma implícita. El discurso sobre la conciliación de la vida laboral y familiar privilegia las desigualdades producidas por el género y la distinción binaria entre hombre y mujer, y tiende a concebir el “hogar” como opresivo, mientras que ve el trabajo

remunerado en el ámbito público como emancipatorio (Mohammad 2004). La “madre trabajadora” aparece como sujeto central en este discurso de igualdad de género, dada la desigual distribución del trabajo doméstico y de cuidados no remunerado. Las madres trabajadoras operan como una categoría tanto normativa como excluyente implícitamente asociada con mujeres autóctonas, blancas, heterosexuales y de clase media. El análisis indica un alejamiento discursivo de la norma del modelo de “varón sustentador” en el caso español, mientras que en Suecia el modelo de “doble sueldo” lleva décadas predominando.

Se hace hincapié en el empleo, tanto en nombre del crecimiento económico como en el de la igualdad de género. Las similitudes entre los debates suecos y españoles pueden entenderse a la luz del contexto supranacional de la Unión Europea, donde las medidas para la igualdad de género se han perfilado por la agenda de la creación de empleo y la Estrategia de Empleo Europea (Outshoorn y Kantola 2007; Stratigaki 2004; Rubery 2002). Las investigaciones han señalado que los cambios en los Estados del bienestar europeos han supuesto un cambio general hacia un modelo de “doble sueldo”, asumiendo la participación de la mujer en el mercado laboral como la norma. Las políticas de la Unión Europea ponen énfasis en el empleo, la competitividad global y los problemas de envejecimiento de la población y de bajas tasas de natalidad. Dado que las políticas de la Unión Europea han tenido tendencia a recalcar la importancia del empleo y que se ha priorizado la participación de las mujeres en el mercado laboral ante las necesidades relacionadas con los cuidados, los discursos dominantes generalmente han encumbrado la “ética del trabajo” en lugar de la “ética del cuidado” (Williams 2010). Puede considerarse que la asociación del trabajo remunerado con el éxito y la emancipación eclipsa los problemas de discriminación, explotación y desigualdades en la vida laboral. Además, se puede argumentar que la asociación del trabajo remunerado con la emancipación, la autonomía, la realización personal y la elección refleja la experiencia de mujeres relativamente privilegiadas. Nancy Fraser argumenta que cualquier modelo de Estado del bienestar centrado en el empleo tendrá dificultades para construir una posición respetable para los que son definidos como “no trabajadores/as”; al valorizar el trabajo remunerado, de manera implícita infravalora el trabajo no remunerado. Aunque el empleo remunerado sea muy importante para las mujeres, habría que reflexionar de manera crítica sobre la convergencia de “intereses feministas”, que ponen énfasis en el empleo femenino, con los intereses del capitalismo global (Fraser 2009; Hrženjak 2007; Barker 2005). En nombre de la emancipación femenina, el trabajo remunerado parece ser aún más valorado. Esta visión de la igualdad de género se basa en la negación de las brechas de clase.

Servicio doméstico: diferencias y silencios

El análisis de los debates políticos referentes al servicio doméstico demuestra cómo un asunto puede convertirse en un problema de desigualdad de género en la agenda en un contexto nacional, mientras que en otro contexto se considera un problema marginal o un “no problema”. ¿Por qué el servicio doméstico se ha convertido en una cuestión tan polémica en la agenda sueca y no en la española?

En Suecia el servicio doméstico se ha articulado como un importante problema público dentro de un discurso dominante sobre la igualdad de género. La igualdad de género ha sido un discurso dominante en la política sueca durante mucho tiempo (Magnusson, Rönnblom y Silius 2008). La igualdad de género se ha construido como parte de la identidad nacional (Towns 2002), por lo tanto, el que la idea de las “criadas” fuera controvertida en Suecia puede entenderse a la luz de la noción de “ser sueco”, como de liderazgo internacional en asuntos relacionados con la igualdad de género y el Estado del bienestar (Gavanas 2006). La cuestión del trabajo doméstico remunerado ha sido muy controvertida, pero ninguno de los actores ha dudado de que el servicio doméstico estuviera estrechamente ligado a la (des)igualdad de género. Las voces de izquierda vinculan el servicio doméstico a la explotación de mujeres de clase trabajadora e inmigrantes. El fomento del servicio doméstico aumenta la desigualdad a causa de la preponderancia de trabajo precario feminizado en el sector de servicio doméstico. Mujeres y hombres deberían compartir el trabajo doméstico y de cuidados en lugar de externalizarlo hacia “otras” mujeres. Los partidos de derecha argumentan que el servicio doméstico aumenta la igualdad al proporcionar a las mujeres oportunidades para participar en el mercado laboral en igualdad de condiciones que los hombres. El discurso de los partidos de derecha, caracterizado por las normas de individualismo, libertad de elección y ética del trabajo, como también por el énfasis en la liberación de las mujeres del trabajo no remunerado para dedicarse a carreras profesionales, y el enfoque de los partidos de izquierda sobre la norma de compartir el trabajo doméstico y de cuidados entre hombres y mujeres han dejado poco espacio para las voces de las trabajadoras domésticas.

Por contraste, las políticas de igualdad de género son relativamente recientes en España. Sin embargo, se han adoptado muchas medidas políticas en la última década para promover la igualdad de género. El Partido Socialista en el gobierno desde 2004 ha convertido la igualdad de género en una cuestión central en la agenda política; como consecuencia, durante este gobierno se aprobó la Ley de Igualdad (3/2007). Lo que no significa, por otra parte, que hubiera consenso político con respecto a la importancia del asunto. En resumen, el discurso político oficial sobre la igualdad de género no ha incluido la cuestión del servicio doméstico o de los derechos de las trabajadoras domésticas. Esto a pesar de que el servicio doméstico se ha articulado como esencialmente “diferente” del trabajo normal dentro del sistema de la Seguridad Social, en el *Régimen Especial de Empleados del Hogar*, legitimando e institucionalizando así derechos sociales más débiles. El Estado del bienestar español a menudo depende del trabajo precario de trabajadoras domésticas inmigrantes, algo que en los debates se ignoró por completo. A diferencia de Suecia, la perpetuación de la división sexual del trabajo de acuerdo con las relaciones de clase y raza/etnia, a través del traspaso de los cuidados y del trabajo doméstico a mujeres de clase trabajadora e inmigrantes, casi nunca se ha cuestionado. Las trabajadoras domésticas son las “otras” invisibles en las políticas de igualdad que privilegian los intereses de las familias de clase media y los problemas de conciliación de la vida laboral y familiar de las “mujeres trabajadoras” (Peterson 2007). Las desigualdades de clase han sido normalmente un problema ignorado, a diferencia de la frecuencia con que las desigualdades de clase aparecen en los debates suecos (entre los partidos de izquierda). Visto que el servicio doméstico está relativamente desmarcado del problema de desigualdad de género, las cuidadoras y trabajadoras domésticas han sido

marginadas como sujetos. Asimismo, en el debate parlamentario de 2005 el servicio doméstico se considera cada vez más necesario para hacer viable la vida familiar y laboral, dada la participación de las mujeres en el mercado laboral. Pero el debate no refleja un vínculo claro entre el servicio doméstico y el discurso de igualdad de género. La reforma iniciada por el gobierno reforzará el vínculo entre el servicio doméstico y los derechos laborales pero el discurso seguirá seguramente desvinculado de la cuestión de igualdad de género.

Legitimación del Estado del bienestar: “favorable a las mujeres”?

En lugar de presuponer la existencia de un Estado del bienestar favorable, o desfavorable, a las mujeres en términos generales, he explorado las maneras en que los debates políticos formulan el problema de la desigualdad de género en diferentes contextos. Asimismo, he explorado las maneras en que los debates políticos legitiman el Estado del bienestar, negocian sus límites y lo construyen, o no, como “favorable a las mujeres”. En España el Estado del bienestar se ha extendido y desarrollado en algunas áreas durante la última década como, por ejemplo, en el derecho a la baja por paternidad y en el cuidado de personas mayores. La Ley de Dependencia (39/2006) se ha articulado como una ley que orienta el desarrollo del Estado del bienestar hacia un Estado más favorable a las mujeres, ayudando a liberar a las mujeres de los “cuidados” y permitirles ir a “trabajar”. Sin embargo, las soluciones privadas e individuales al problema del trabajo de cuidados han quedado sin cuestionar. Puede considerarse que la amplísima aceptación del servicio doméstico como una forma de provisión de cuidados fortalece la legitimidad del Estado con limitada responsabilidad en la provisión de cuidados (*non-caring state*). El Estado del bienestar sueco se representa como favorable a las mujeres principalmente por los partidos de izquierda en términos de ayudar a las mujeres a compaginar la vida laboral y familiar y en términos de emplear a muchas mujeres en el sector público. Al mismo tiempo, de manera general se reconoce que los recortes en el Estado del bienestar han afectado en particular a las mujeres, como trabajadoras del sector público y como cuidadoras no remuneradas. De esta manera, el Estado del bienestar sueco deja de ser tan favorable a las mujeres como antaño. La “libertad de elección” es un discurso importante entre los partidos de derecha. Desde esta perspectiva, el Estado no debe intervenir siempre, la familia debe ser libre de elegir cómo gestionar el equilibrio entre trabajo, familia y tiempo libre. El individuo es capaz de tomar las mejores decisiones en términos de lo que es mejor para su familia. Como hemos visto anteriormente, la norma de la igualdad de género se diluye en este discurso sobre la libertad de elección. La Alianza de centro-derecha en el gobierno desde 2006 ha argumentado a favor de la reducción de responsabilidades estatales, la reestructuración de prestaciones y servicios sociales, el fomentar iniciativas privadas y hace hincapié en la responsabilidad individual. Para concluir, los debates suecos se han alejado del discurso sobre el Estado del bienestar favorable para las mujeres hacia un fuerte enfoque sobre la libertad de elección.

Como ya he argumentado, la misma noción de un Estado del bienestar favorable a las mujeres se ve puesta en entredicho por los desarrollos del pensamiento feminista, que cuestiona cualquier interpretación unitaria de la categoría de “mujeres”. El género debe entenderse como inherentemente entrelazado con las categorías clase, raza/etnia y

sexualidad (Butler 1990). La categoría “mujeres” es tanto normativa como excluyente. Siguiendo en esta línea, he desarrollado el concepto de interseccionalidad política como una herramienta analítica para examinar las suposiciones normativas y las exclusiones, y las maneras en que los discursos proporcionan determinadas posiciones de sujeto en un contexto determinado (Dahl 2000). Mi argumento es que el Estado del bienestar no puede considerarse *a priori* “favorable a las mujeres” o “desfavorable para las mujeres”; no obstante, estudios empíricos exhaustivos pueden revelar cómo las políticas públicas específicas construyen el género y la desigualdad de género y éstos nos ayudan a interpretar potenciales efectos. El análisis subraya que las políticas sociales diseñadas para crear igualdad de género pueden marginar a “otras” mujeres al privilegiar determinadas categorías de mujeres y hombres, y lo ilustra de varias maneras. Por ejemplo, tanto en el contexto español como en el sueco, la “madre trabajadora” aparece como un sujeto central en el discurso sobre la igualdad de género, con referencia a la desigual distribución del trabajo doméstico y de cuidados no remunerado. Las madres trabajadoras operan como una categoría normativa y excluyente, implícitamente asociada con mujeres autóctonas, blancas, heterosexuales y de clase media (o alta). Se puede argumentar que la asociación del trabajo remunerado con la emancipación y el éxito refleja la experiencia de mujeres relativamente privilegiadas, ignorando las implicaciones de clase. Al mismo tiempo, la visión dominante de la igualdad de género se caracteriza por un discurso liberal de “inclusión”, de acuerdo al cual las mujeres deben participar en el mercado laboral de la misma manera que los hombres, y que privilegia, en lugar de poner en entredicho, la norma del trabajador en masculino.

English Summary

Introduction

Given the sexual division of labour whereby women, and not men, perform the lion's share of care and domestic work, feminist welfare state research has made care a central topic. All welfare states position themselves in relation to the political location of care work: how it should be performed, by whom and where (Sundström 2003). Welfare state models where the state extensively assumes responsibility for care provision have been regarded as more favourable for women, more "women-friendly" (Lewis 1992; Anttonen 2005; Sainsbury 1999; Daly 2001). The social organization of care can be considered a crucial issue for social policy in European welfare states in the context of ageing populations, welfare state restructurings and the norm of dual earner families (Leira and Saraceno 2002). By analyzing current policies surrounding care we can understand processes of change in European welfare states. Furthermore, the globalization of care and domestic work has become an important phenomenon in Europe, particularly where welfare state provision is scarce. The phenomenon of "global care chains", with migrant women from the Third World performing care and domestic work in households in the First World, points at the complex relationship between gender inequality and care.

This thesis sets out to explore how gender inequality has been framed as a policy problem in European politics of care in the period of time between 1995 and 2010. To this end, I analyze how gender inequality has been framed as a policy problem in two European welfare states: Spain and Sweden. I define the politics of care as the politics of constructing meanings of care and the thesis analyzes three different policy debates which revolve around care and domestic work, traditionally associated with "women's work": the "reconciliation of work and family life", "care for dependent people" and "domestic service". I consider these policy debates as reflecting the (re)construction and legitimation of the welfare state and its limitations and the analysis reveals the continuous negotiation of welfare state boundaries. Moreover, these debates reveal different and shifting interpretations of the relationship between gender (in)equality and the welfare state.

The title of the thesis –*Beyond the "women-friendly" welfare state: Framing gender inequality as a policy problem in Spanish and Swedish politics of care*– connects with the theoretical framework of the thesis which critically assesses some of the normative assumptions of comparative feminist welfare state studies. This literature has tended to offer a vision of gender equality in line with the "dual earner" model, based on the assumption that women's participation in the labour market is the key to gender equality. Exclusionary representations of gender equality, defined as equality only for white, heterosexual, working mothers, can be found in this research. As such, comparative gender and welfare studies often ignore the ways in which state policies and discourses privilege some women and men over others. They do not sufficiently explore differences between women, neither do they reflect sufficiently upon the differences within states (Kantola and Dahl 2005). Taking this criticism seriously, the feminist welfare state analysis that I develop in this thesis allows for an examination of different,

dominant and marginal, representations of gender inequality in policies surrounding care and domestic work. The analysis scrutinizes the underlying normative assumptions underpinning dominant problem representations (Bacchi 1999; Bustelo and Lombardo 2007; Verloo 2007). Rather than thinking about Nordic welfare states as essentially “women-friendly” and Southern European welfare states as fundamentally “women-unfriendly”, I emphasize that, depending on how policies define and construct gender and gender inequality in specific contexts, they can have both empowering and/or disempowering effects on women – and men.

The research project is guided by the principal research question, “how is gender inequality constructed in the politics of care?”. In order to tackle this question, a number of supplementary questions were developed:

7. How is gender inequality articulated as a policy problem in the welfare states of Spain and Sweden?
8. What are the normative assumptions and silences underpinning these problem representations?
9. What normative assumptions are shared across countries? What are the context-bound differences and silences?

The aim of the first question is to explore the construction of gender inequality as a policy problem in the politics of care in Spain and Sweden and, thereby, examine the linkages between gender and the welfare state in different contexts. The second question deals with the normative assumptions underpinning the problem representations – and the solutions offered. The dominating narratives and their silences are in focus with the aim to reveal the normative subjects of gender equality policies, and processes of exclusion. The third question aims to compare the Spanish and Swedish case studies, examining what normative assumptions are shared across countries and what the silences in each national context are. Contrasting the case studies is useful in order to get a better understanding of how gender inequality is framed in the context of European welfare state change.

Theoretical framework

The analysis aims to contribute to our understanding of gender and the welfare state in the European context. The study is situated within feminist welfare state research, which is the body of analysis that I aim to contribute to. How can the existing insights of feminist welfare state research be used, and developed, in order to analyze the relationship between gender inequality and the politics of care? In order to tackle this question, the theoretical framework scrutinizes the representation of gender inequality in the literature on gender and the welfare state.

Comparative feminist welfare studies often, implicitly or explicitly, put forward a certain type of welfare state as normative. The models thought to be more women-friendly are those models where the state extensively assumes responsibility for care provision, such as the “dual breadwinner” model (Lewis 1992), the “Nordic model of social care” (Anttonen 2005), the “earner-carer” model (Sainsbury 1999) and the

“caring state” (Daly 2001). Social policy has been conceived as the embodiment of the women-friendliness of welfare states (Kantola and Dahl 2005; Hobson 2004; Anttonen 2002; Sörensen and Bergqvist 2002). Mainstream and feminist comparative welfare state research converge around the thesis that in the countries where the state effectively converts the “private” duty of care into a “public responsibility” the conditions for the development of full civil, political and social citizenship for women are better fulfilled (Bussemaker and Kees van Kersbergen 2000). The vision of the women-friendly welfare state has come to refer, to a large extent, to the possibilities of combining employment and care. Within this vein, Nordic welfare states have frequently been represented as the most women-friendly.

As critical feminist accounts of the welfare state have shown, the normative idea of the women-friendly welfare state rests on a problematic view of women’s interests as common and collective and essentially different from the interests of men (Borchorst and Siim 2002). Gender and welfare state research has tended to claim that all women are liberated through the state in the same way, and women are represented as a homogenous category. The idea of the women-friendly welfare state assumes a non-repressive state and privileges social policy as a mechanism to produce equality (Kantola and Dahl 2005). Gender equality is associated with equality for white, heterosexual, working mothers (Kantola 2006; Hobson 2004). The women-friendly welfare state is most often linked to equality as sameness and based on the norm of “dual earner” model where both women and men are waged workers. Hence, the approach puts forward the premise of women’s labour market participation as the key to gender equality (Borchorst and Siim 2002). The association of paid work with emancipation, autonomy, self-realization and choice can be argued to reflect the experience of relatively privileged women (Barker 2005). Given the understanding of women as a homogeneous category, and gender analysis as a comparison between women and men (Daly and Rake 2003; Daly 2000b), comparative gender and welfare state studies have often overlooked the implications of “intersectionality”.

I argue that intersectionality speaks not only to the assumptions of the women-friendly Nordic welfare state but also to the assumptions of the implicitly “women unfriendly” welfare state. The strong male breadwinner model, often associated with the Southern European welfare state, also builds upon exclusionary norms. It considers the problem of gender inequality to be mainly a problem of white, middle- or upper-class, heterosexual mothers. The norms of the “male breadwinner” and the “female caretaker” can be understood as ideals which primarily correspond to relatively well-off families. Poor and working-class women have always had to engage in income-generating work in formal and informal labour markets. Public policies have often privileged white, middle-class women encouraging them to be stay-at-home mothers, while refusing migrant and working-class women this support (O’Connor, Orloff and Shaver 1999; Williams 1995). The critical assessment of feminist welfare state analysis is useful as it helps me to elaborate the analytical focus on normative assumptions and silences, which form the basis for the intersectional approach to welfare state analysis in this study.

While feminists have often considered care and domestic work as a common burden imposed on women by patriarchy, and feminist welfare studies have mainly focused on women’s unpaid care and domestic work in the family, theories on “global care chains” and the “international transfer of caretaking” have raised questions about

different forms of social inequality and divisions among women in the global economy of care (Anderson 2000; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003; Salazar Parreñas 2001). That care and domestic work encompass categories of gender, class and race/ethnicity is not new, as post-colonial scholars reveal (Lewis 2006). But the phenomenon of global care chains, where cheap migrant labour is demanded by average- and high-income households aspiring to combine employment and family life, reinforces the need for an intersectional approach to social policy (Kvist and Peterson 2010; Lutz 2002). The insights stemming from the literature on global care chains have implications for the welfare state analysis I develop as they motivate the inclusion of the policy debate on paid domestic (care) work as a contrast to the more traditional topics of parenting and elderly care. Studies on women's *unpaid* care work in the home, as in gender and welfare state research, and women's *paid* domestic (care) work, as in the global care chains literature, are seldom informed by each other (Anderson 2000). Addressing this weakness, this thesis brings them together. I also argue that theories on global care chains do not pay sufficient attention to the role of the state in articulating meanings and value of paid domestic work and in shaping the positions of domestic workers. Recognizing the importance of studies that analyze the experiences and strategies of migrant domestic workers, I argue that a "top-down" perspective is useful because it explores the ways in which the state, through its public policies, shapes the social organization of care and the position of domestic workers by, for instance, constructing domestic workers as a legitimate solution to problems such as the "reconciliation of work and family life".

In sum, a feminist welfare state analysis needs to take intersectionality into account for various reasons. Firstly, intersectionality has become central to any understanding of gender through the developments within feminist theory. Secondly, critics have shown that gender and welfare state studies often put forward an exclusionary vision of gender equality defined as equality only for white, heterosexual, working mothers. Thirdly, the literature on global care chains reveals the need to problematize any unitary category of "women" in relation to care and domestic work given the interconnection of gender, race/ethnicity, and class in the global economy. Embracing the concept of intersectionality has involved placing those who are currently marginalized in the centre. But social categories should not be seen as counting only for the marginalized, the non-privileged "other"; they also count as conditions for the privileged (Staunæs 2003). Intersectionality is concerned with challenging the normative subject of feminism (Brah and Phoenix 2004), or gender equality policies. I find Kimberly Crenshaw's (1991) concept of political intersectionality useful here. It refers to how inequalities and their intersections are relevant at the level of policy and politics. Crenshaw shows how both race discrimination policies and sex discrimination policies have tended to marginalize the experiences of black women privileging white women and black men respectively. The present analysis pays attention to the ways in which gender equality policies privilege certain groups of women -and men- over others.

Care related policies can be considered generally favourable for women in terms of enabling them to be mothers of small children and daughters to elderly parents and, at the same time, have paid work. Nevertheless, care policies cannot be interpreted as *automatically* empowering for *all* women (Kantola and Dahl 2005). My argument is that the welfare state cannot be seen as a priori "women-friendly" or "unfriendly", but in-depth empirical studies can reveal how specific public policies construct gender and

gender (in)equality and help us interpret the effects on women and men. Depending on the ways in which policies construct meanings of gender and categories of class, race/ethnicity and sexuality, they can be seen as potentially empowering and/or disempowering. The analysis thus shows how care related policies, which generally aim to improve gender equality, can marginalize “other” women. The point of departure here is that the category of women is both normative and exclusionary and it is commonly invoked without challenging, for instance, class or racial privilege (Butler 1990). Gender is not constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts. As such, this thesis explores the ways in which gender equality is discursively produced in policy debates surrounding care and domestic work in the specific contexts of Spain and Sweden. And rather than assuming the existence of a women-friendly welfare state in general terms, I am interested in the ways in which policy debates construct the welfare state as “women-friendly” –or not.

Methodology

As a researcher I do not stand outside of representations and, hence, I do not aim to take an objective position, telling the “truth” about what gender equality “really” is (Rönblom 2005) or about what the “best” welfare state type is. Following from this, the aim is not to objectively test theoretical hypotheses but to use the theoretical framework as a source of inspiration in identifying critical inquiry and developing the analytical tools to scrutinize the empirical material (Dahl 2000). Gender equality is not something that just “is” in some unproblematic way, but something that may be understood and packaged in several different ways, each with different consequences (Magnusson, Rönblom and Silius 2008). I study gender equality policies, not in order to objectively evaluate their failure or success, but to critically scrutinize the problem representations, their normative assumptions and the silences. The purpose is to analyze the way in which gender inequality is produced as a policy problem and thus given certain meanings while other meanings are obscured.

The social constructivist approach is largely inspired by Carol Bacchi’s *What’s the problem represented to be?* approach (1999). This approach rests on the presumption that there are no objective policy problems and that “truths” are constructed within discourse. Furthermore, discourses have important material and immaterial effects. Competing ideas about what the problem is can be discovered as we ask complementary questions about who is regarded as responsible for the problem, what the causes and effects of the problem are, and what solutions are proposed to solve the problem. Absences in the political agenda are significant for the analysis given that they say something about what is being excluded or marginalized. Within this vein, I analyze different representations of gender inequality on the agenda and pay attention to what goes unquestioned. The approach defines policy as discourse, and discourses can be seen as systems of thoughts composed of ideas, beliefs and practices (Lessa 2006). The process of constructing policy problems is referred to as a framing process, but the focus falls upon underlying normative assumptions rather than seeing discourses as intentionally used by different actors for specific purposes. The effects of discourse can be related to the ways in which

subjects are constituted in discourse. Following from this, the analysis pays attention to the ways in which discourses privilege certain subject positions and marginalize others.

The analysis aims to reveal and scrutinize dominating gender discourses. Feminism has often challenged masculine discourses creating spaces for marginal discourses and revealing the ways in which women are positioned as the “other”, while the male is constructed as the norm. Nevertheless, feminism and feminist research also contribute to the creation of certain realities, while marginalizing others. As we have seen, feminist comparative welfare state studies have generated a discourse that defines the problem of gender inequality as a problem for white, heterosexual, working mothers. The analysis is inspired by Nancy Fraser’s work on gender and the welfare state (1989), which pays attention to the underlying normative assumptions of social policies. As Fraser sustains, this focus provides a framework for feminists to meaningfully intervene in debates over social spending and the restructuring of the welfare state. The analysis is also inspired by critical accounts of gender equality that reveal the framing of gender equality as essentially linked to taken-for-granted norms such as economic growth, progress and modernity (Rönnblom 2009, Mohammad 2005, Towns 2002).

Dominating gender discourses are analyzed by means of a textual analysis of official policy documents. The policy texts were selected according to their relevance in articulating gender inequality as a policy problem and in reflecting important policy shifts. As such, the analyzed documents are acts, parliamentary debates, government bills, parliamentary bills, policy plans and policy reports. The textual analysis draws upon Critical Frame Analysis developed within two European research projects that I have participated in: MAGEEQ and QUING (<http://www.quing.eu>; <http://www.mageeq.net>; <http://www.proyectomageeq.org>). The starting point is that there are multiple ways of framing gender inequality as a policy problem and, thus, that there are multiple visions of gender equality embedded in problem representations (Lombardo, Meier and Verloo 2009; Bustelo and Lombardo 2007; Verloo and Lombardo 2007). Building upon the guide to textual analysis (*sensitizing questions*) developed within the research projects, I adapted it to this particular study. The textual analysis draws special attention to dimensions of diagnosis (problem representation) and prognosis (solutions offered), gender and intersectionality, location (private and public, state and family responsibility) and voice (normative subject positions, legitimate voices and exclusion). The joint analysis of the different textual analyses (*super-texts*) identified the dominant discourses surrounding gender inequality with attention to underlying normative assumptions and silences.

Case studies

The study analyzes and compares policy debates surrounding care and domestic work in a Southern European welfare state, Spain, and a Northern European welfare state, Sweden, in the period of time between 1995, the year of the United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing, and 2010.

Care is a relatively new issue on the political agenda in Spain, but since 1995 it has become widely debated in relation to the problems of “reconciliation of work and family life” and “dependent care”. These two policy debates are analyzed in the Spanish case study. Feminist researchers have most often emphasized the “familialistic” character of

the Spanish welfare state and, thus, the ways in which the Spanish welfare state attributes a key role to women's unpaid care and domestic work (Threlfall, Cousins and Valiente 2005; Carrasco et al. 1997). At the same time, Spain has moved from a strong "male breadwinner" model towards a "dual earner" model in a context of an (until the economic crisis) increasing participation of women in the labour market, an ageing population and new migration patterns. Research indicates that, rather than public care provision, individual and "private" solutions are still dominant, although shifting in character. For instance, some studies emphasize the crucial role of female migrant domestic workers in child and elderly care (Martínez Buján 2007; Tobío 2005). The phenomenon of "global care chains" can be argued to be more significant in Southern European contexts than Nordic ones given that, in the former, public care provision is scarce. The Spanish case study analyzes the issue of "domestic service" as a third debate, indeed a quite marginal policy debate in spite of the efforts of domestic workers' organizations and the feminist movement to put domestic workers' demands on the political agenda. Importantly, even though references to the period of the economic crisis are included, the analysis mainly focuses on the period when social policy was developed in the issues of reconciliation and dependent care, until 2008. Although a crucial topic for future studies, the impact of the economic crisis and the overall cuts in social spending on the welfare state and gender equality is beyond the scope of this study.

In Sweden gender equality has been constructed as part of the national identity, wanting to set an example for other countries and the European Union, particularly in issues regarding the combining of work and family life (Hobson, Lewis and Siim 2002; Towns 2002). The Nordic welfare state has been characterized as a "dual breadwinner" model (Lewis 1992) or "earner-carer" model (Sainsbury 1999), where both women and men are entitled to be carers and earners. Policies that facilitate the combining of work and family life have a relatively long history in Sweden. An extensive social policy has been directed at more or less all sections of the population on the basis of citizenship (Bergqvist et al. 1999). These policies include extensive and flexible parental leaves, good availability of public child care services and extensive public care provisions for the elderly (Szebehely 2005). Domestic service in private households is a much more common practice in Spain than in Sweden, but has been widely debated in Sweden and not Spain. Researchers have linked the expansion of the domestic service market in Sweden since the 1990s with the retrenchment of the welfare state. The policy debate on "domestic service", often referred to as the "maid debate" (*pigdebatten*), emerged in the mid 1990s (Kvist and Peterson 2010; Platzer 2007; Gavanas 2006). It has revolved around the question whether domestic services should be subsidized by the state; a law on tax credits for domestic services was finally adopted in 2007 with the right-wing "Alliance" in government. The Swedish case study is more limited in its scope than the Spanish in terms of the material analyzed (mainly parliamentary debates) and in terms of letting one policy debate, "domestic service", reveal current representations of the problem of "reconciliation of work and family life" and of elderly care ("dependent care" in Spain). Nonetheless, the Swedish debate provides an interesting contrast to the Spanish case study because it turns domestic service into a contentious gender (in)equality issue with a prolonged debate in the parliament. Additionally, it reveals problem representations of gender inequality which hardly appear in the Spanish context as the debate is crucially about the intersection of gender and class.

Given the prevalence of quantitative and positivist comparative research, qualitative and discourse-oriented comparisons have been marginal, not least within comparative gender and welfare state research. While comparative studies have been criticized for making comparisons when concepts have different meanings in different contexts, cross-country differences in meanings of gender inequality are here seen as the point of departure. Moreover, this study analyzes different forms of care but, in contrast to the attempts to formulate a coherent and all-encompassing notion of care (Daly and Lewis 1999; Thomas 1993), I see discourses surrounding care as multiple, context-related and contradictory.

The thesis draws upon gender and welfare state regimes to argue that it is interesting to compare Spain and Sweden as they are often taken as representatives of opposite welfare state models in the European context and, therefore, represent a women-friendly and a women un-friendly model respectively. Nonetheless, the analysis challenges studies that elaborate typologies and wide generalizations across welfare states and set a specific type of welfare state as the ideal. It combines in-depth empirical analysis recognizing the complexity of each case with a comparative analysis of the similarities and differences between the states. The idea is not to analyze the Spanish case in terms of comparing it with an ideal Nordic model, rather I see the Swedish case study as providing a useful contrast to highlight normative assumptions and silences in the Spanish agenda, and vice versa. The comparative approach is helpful to pinpoint both dominant discourses and what is not being problematized in each national context. Overall, the contrasting case studies serve to illuminate the problem of gender inequality in the context of European welfare states.

Results: framing gender inequality as a policy problem in Spanish politics of care

Here I will present the main results of the Spanish case study. The analysis focuses on the framing of gender inequality as a policy problem within three policy debates: the reconciling of work and family life, dependent care and domestic service.

When the issue of *reconciliation of work and family life* emerged on the agenda during the Conservative government at the end of the 1990s, it was framed as a working mother's issue. Women should have children but women's place was also considered to be in the labour market. An important element in the policy discourse was the emphasis on women's labour market participation as the key to gender equality. The dominant discourse on gender equality emphasized economic growth and modernization and the norm of equality as "inclusion": women should be integrated into formal employment on an equal footing with men, but masculine norms were not questioned. Modern working mothers' combining professional careers and care for children became the legitimate subject of gender equality and the symbol of progress. The policies on reconciliation privileged those with formal employment, thereby excluding certain groups of women: unemployed women and employees of the informal sector, often working-class and migrant women. The recognition of the problem of an unequal distribution of care and domestic work responsibilities between women and men contrasted with the lack of policy measures addressing men. Furthermore, the framing of reconciliation as the key to gender equality contrasted with the normative assumption of family responsibility in care

and the discourse on families' freedom of choice and intergenerational solidarity, which rather (re)produced the sexual division of work. While a "dual earner" model was promoted, the solutions were primarily individual, not collective. The heterosexual family was an unquestioned norm in this debate, presupposing that families are constituted by a man and a woman, a mother and a father.

During the Socialist government (2004-) the reconciliation of personal, family and work life has been a salient issue. "Working mothers" were still the legitimate subjects of these policies and, in extension, of gender equality. But the focus was extended to fathers and the norm of "co-responsibility" was introduced. In the Equality Act co-responsibility referred to the sharing of care and domestic work between women and men. Co-responsibility was seen as the key to achieve gender equality, and the new (2 weeks) individual paternity leave was celebrated as a ground-breaking measure. All in all, gender equality continued to be located within a discourse on economic growth and employment, promoting "equal opportunities" in the labour market and "women's employability"; women's adaptation to labour market requirements, not the reverse. But the problem of reconciliation was considered a public concern recognizing that the state has the responsibility to provide solutions. The Strategic Plan for Equal Opportunities extended the idea of co-responsibility from the sharing of care and domestic work between women and men to social co-responsibility including the responsibility of the state in conceding rights and providing care services and promoting corporate responsibility. Simultaneously, the concept of "family obligations" continued to be a common notion. In view of the economic crisis individual solutions and family care will most likely be reinforced in the near future.

Overall, the analysis of the debate surrounding the reconciliation of work and family life shows that gender equality has been associated with women's participation in the labour market. In the name of female emancipation and economic growth, paid work has been further appraised (Williams 2010; Fraser 2009). This vision of gender equality involves the negation of class divisions. The association of paid work with success and emancipation overshadows problems of sex segregation, discrimination and precarious working conditions in work life. Since the emergence of the issue of reconciliation of work and family life on the agenda the policy debate has produced a homogenous image of "women", presupposing that all women share the same problems and interests regarding care and work dilemmas. The implicit normative subjects have been white, heterosexual, and middle-class (or upper-class) autochthonous women. Academic work on global care chains has highlighted the way in which Southern European welfare states rely on paid domestic care work provided by migrant workers. Nevertheless, migrant women and domestic workers have generally been marginalized in the debate. When migrant women appeared they were depicted as the oppressed "other" in comparison to modern autochthonous women. By and large, the problems of migrant women workers, often facilitating the reconciliation of work and family life of Spanish men and women, have been ignored.

The Dependent Care Act adopted in 2006 put *care for dependent persons* on the political agenda in Spain and assigned state responsibility in providing care for dependent persons. A new, allegedly universal, citizen right was adopted in order to guarantee minimum national standards in the care for dependent persons. To find solutions to the care for dependent people was represented as one of the major challenges of developed

countries. The debate surrounding dependent care constructed the problem as a matter of dependent persons receiving care, and care workers remained in the shadow. Although the reform visibilized care as a policy problem, it marginalized issues surrounding care workers' rights, salaries and working conditions. Care for the elderly was largely disconnected from the problem of gender inequality and the construction of care as women's work was disregarded. In this sense, the debate surrounding dependent care clearly differed from the debate on reconciling work and family life. The Dependent Care Act was articulated in gender-neutral terms, speaking about carers in their masculine form.

Nonetheless, the Minister of Labour and Social Affairs justified the legal reform by labelling it as a gender equality project providing women with greater opportunities in the labour market and possibilities of reconciling work and family life. Within this vein, the representation of gender (in)equality in the debate on dependent care converged with the debate on reconciliation of work and family life. A vision of the welfare state as women-friendly emerged in the sense that the state would help liberate women from care to allow them to go to work. Furthermore, the Strategic Plan for Equal Opportunities referred to the new policy on dependent care as a gender equality policy that recognized care workers and promoted the professionalization of care work. But the precarious allowances for the (female) family caregiver established with the Dependent Care Act and the absence in the debate of the category of domestic care workers are clear indications of the marginalization of the care workers. The family allowance has been criticized by the feminist movement for reproducing the care work as women's work, with little value attached to it. While the employment of domestic workers for elderly care is a frequent practice in the Spanish welfare state, the category of domestic workers was absent in the Dependent Care Act and in the parliamentary debates. Overall, the enhanced role of the state in care provision involved a shift away from the dominating view of elderly care as almost exclusively a family matter, constructing care as a public concern, but the norm of state responsibility co-existed with a continuing focus on family care, market solutions and the third sector.

The existence of a *Special Regime for Domestic Workers* established in 1985 provides an important background for the issue of *domestic service*. This Social Security regime provides far less social protection for workers than the General Regime of the Social Security system. Indeed, the European Commission has censured the Special Regime for Domestic Workers for violating the European Directive on equal treatment of men and women and, particularly, the Directive on equal treatment in the Social Security system. The Socialist government has just recently come to an agreement with the main trade unions, the General Workers' Union *UGT* and Workers' Commissions *CCOO*, to improve the status of domestic workers by integrating the Special Regime into the General Regime of the Social Security system and a reform is under way. Still, in spite of the importance of domestic workers in welfare provision, and the particularly precarious status of domestic workers, there has been very little policy debate on the issue and consequently paid domestic work has been a marginal issue on the political agenda in Spain.

The analysis of the issue domestic service focuses especially on a parliamentary debate from 2005 that set the issue of domestic workers rights in the centre of dispute. The Social Security system has certainly constructed paid domestic work as "different"

from normal types of work. The different character of domestic work was underlined in diverse ways in the parliamentary debate, from highlighting the servitude inherent in this work to claiming that the character of the work makes it almost impossible to regulate. In this debate the different character of the work was linked to class- and gender-based inequalities and discrimination. Also migrant workers' particularly vulnerable position was discussed, referring to their lack of workers' rights and domination in female dominated jobs that attain little social value. Nevertheless, the debate was also articulated as related to the question of finding solutions to Spanish families' reconciliation problems. Domestic workers rights were situated within a neo-liberal discourse, where economic growth and employment were privileged norms. By privileging the issues of reconciliation, middle-class families' interests and quality of life, economic stability and employment, the policy discourse marginalized domestic workers as subjects. The policy debates show that domestic service was constructed as a viable private solution to welfare state problems. The wide acceptance of such individual and private solutions can even be seen as justifying the lack of state responsibility in care provision, reinforcing the legitimacy of the "non-caring" state.

When domestic service appeared on the agenda it was mainly framed as an issue of domestic workers rights. In contrast, domestic service has hardly ever been framed as an issue of gender inequality in gender equality policies. The policy debates surrounding care and domestic work generally focused on the problem of reconciliation of work and family life, and here gender inequality was linked to women's *unpaid* care and domestic work. Little attention has been paid to the issue of *paid* domestic care work. The perpetuation of the gendered division of labour, along divisions of class, race/ethnicity and nationality, by means of transferring care work and domestic work from Spanish men and women to "other" women was hardly ever disputed or challenged. In the debates on "reconciliation" and "dependent care" the figure of the domestic worker was almost entirely ignored. In other words, domestic (care) workers were the invisible "other" in Spanish gender equality policies. The reform of the Special Regime with the Social Security Reform Act adopted in 2011 reinforces the framing of domestic service as a question of workers' rights, but not as a question of gender (in)equality.

Results: framing gender inequality as a policy problem in Swedish politics of care

Below I will present the main results of the Swedish case study. The analysis focuses on the framing of gender inequality as a policy problem within the debate on domestic service. The debate on domestic service has revolved around the question whether the state should subsidize domestic services but it has also been articulated as linked to the problem of reconciling work and family life and of elderly care (dependent care in Spain).

Domestic service has definitively been constructed as strongly related to the problem of gender inequality in Sweden. In the debate there has been consensus on that employment is the key to gender equality. But there was a clear left-right division on this issue, where the left emphasized the problem of gender and class inequalities embedded in paid domestic work and the right emphasized domestic services as the key to gender

equality, liberating women from unpaid work and enabling them to dedicate more time to their professional careers. The left-wing parties strongly rejected public subsidies for domestic services and, although they considered employment a key to gender equality, they did not want to create more jobs in this low-wage and low-status sector. They were wary of the low-paid and low-skilled feminized work sector that would be supported through a tax credit for domestic services. The “maid problem” was linked to categories of gender and class and, to a lesser extent, ethnicity. The left frequently returned to the question: who should be the maid of the maid? The creation of maid work would lead to strengthening of class divisions. This perspective also rejected the subsidizing of the private domestic service sector on the basis that this implies dismantling of the welfare state, subsidizing the domestic work in upper-class households instead of guaranteeing universal rights. The idea of promoting the insertion of migrant women in this specific sector was criticized because this would increase labour market segregation reinforcing inequalities related to ethnic background. Nevertheless, domestic workers’ subjectivity was marginalized by the focus on all-encompassing structural inequalities and exploitation and the norm of women and men’s sharing care and domestic work. The discourse on structural gender, class and ethnic inequalities involved in domestic service dominated in a way that provided little room for the aspect of valuing paid domestic work and constructing it as “real work”.

The right-wing parties’ way of framing the issue emphasized that domestic service is just another job. Rejecting the term maid, they represented themselves as the ones revaluing domestic work. Domestic service was considered the key to equality for employers and employees alike. Domestic workers would liberate women (and, implicitly, not men) from unpaid work so that they would be able to spend more time in paid work and advance their professional careers on equal terms with men. The position of female domestic workers would also improve with the tax credit even though it means promoting traditional women’s work: women would supposedly go from an informal to a formal work sector and from unemployment to employment. Work opportunities for specific categories of women would be created: women with low education, young women and immigrant women. Immigrant women would get their first chance to have a real job and a salary and to get to know Swedish people and culture -by cleaning their homes. In other words, domestic service would be the key to integration into Swedish society. In contrast to the left-wing focus on exploitative structures and women and men’s sharing care and domestic work, the right-wing parties tended to adopt an individualistic perspective on domestic workers who were represented as individuals who experience self-realization and pride through work. The discourse was characterized by the norms of individualism, freedom of choice and work ethics, which provided little room for problems of inequalities, exploitation or discrimination. The (female migrant) domestic worker was described as a proud professional and “entrepreneur”, doing what she has freely chosen to do and what she is “good at doing”. The domestic worker that becomes an entrepreneur employing other people to perform the services fitted better the idea of work as a story of success and self-realization. In the end, the idea of valuing paid domestic work has to be considered in the light of the strong work ethics and the norm of economic growth. All -formal- paid work was considered good work because it contributes to the Swedish economy.

A central idea in the Swedish welfare state model is that people should be able to combine paid work with having a family, both men and women, and nobody should have to choose between work and having children. The debate on domestic services was articulated as closely related to the problem of *combining work and family life*. Women and men should be able to participate in the labour market on equal conditions and they should have the same possibilities of combining family life and work life. The problem of the lack of sharing care and domestic work between women and men was highlighted by all political parties, concerned about the fact that women continue to be the main persons in charge of children, home, cleaning, care for the elderly, etc. The heterosexual couple with children appeared as the norm: care and household work should be a shared responsibility in the family supposedly constituted by a man and a woman with children. Given the unequal division of care and domestic work, “working mothers” were represented as the subjects suffering from the problem of combining work and family life. Left-wing voices emphasized gender equality in terms of an equal sharing of care and domestic work between women and men in the home. Women and men should not externalize this work to “other” women: immigrant women and working-class women. Social policy and universal rights were considered the means to achieving an equal sharing. Right-wing voices argued in favour of accepting the difference based on the sexual division of labour and, hence, the solutions proposed focused on turning the female-dominated domestic service work into formal work and on liberating double-working mothers from unpaid domestic work. They also strongly put forward the norm of equality as inclusion in promoting women’s liberation from domestic work in order to achieve equal conditions for women and men in the labour market. Women’s participation in the labour market was largely considered the key to gender equality. Women should be able to participate in the labour market as men do. “Career women” were constructed as a subject that would benefit from domestic service: it would help women to spend more time in advancing their professional careers. Domestic service would increase gender equality because women would get a stronger professional position and increase their economic independence.

The analysis demonstrates that overall employment and the ethics of work were put forward as strong norms. The key to gender equality was women and men’s equal participation in the labour market. Economic independence was articulated as a fundamental part of gender equality since women should maintain themselves through work and be able to live on their own salaries. In a similar vein, employment was also considered the key to the integration of immigrants. Nevertheless, the ethics of work was most strongly articulated by the right-wing parties. They suggested that a tax credit for domestic services was a question of economic growth as well as of gender equality. The tax credit would lead to a creation of many new work opportunities, new companies would emerge in the sector, informal work would turn into formal work and people would spend more time in paid work. The Swedish economy was said to need more paid working hours, especially considering the demographic tensions expected in the future. Employment was represented not only as necessary to ensure economic growth and economic independence but also an essential part of people’s identity and self-respect. Creating more employment would imply more people feeling “proud” of going to work.

There was a wide agreement on the idea of Sweden as an international champion of gender equality. The historic role of the women-friendly welfare state in achieving

gender equality was emphasized mainly by the left wing parties. The Swedish welfare state has helped women to combine work and family, in contrast to Europe where women have had to choose between work and children. The welfare state was seen as facilitating women's high employment rates, both by means of job opportunities in the public sector and by means of liberating women from care and domestic work in the home. At the same time it was generally recognized that welfare state retrenchment has affected women in particular since women in the public sector suffer from worsened working conditions and low salaries. The sum, the Swedish welfare state was not considered as "women-friendly" as it had once been.

The boundaries of the welfare state were negotiated particularly in the issue of *elderly care*. The political parties widely agreed on that, due to the restructuring of the welfare state, many elderly do not get the help they need and that the time family members spend in care work has increased while public home help has decreased. Especially elderly spouses and middle-aged daughters have increased their time in care work. Among elderly with high education there has been an increase in buying private services, but when it comes to elderly with low education, it is rather family and relatives' amount of unpaid care and domestic work that has increased. Left- and right-wing parties had divergent ideas on what to do about this. The right-wing put an emphasis on market solutions; the elderly should be able to buy the services they needed with the help of a tax credit for domestic services. Subsidized domestic service would facilitate everyday life of the elderly and, at the same time, it would alleviate the pressure on the municipality and, hence, the welfare state. The policy on tax credits would help elderly not entitled to municipal home help to pay for some domestic services. Hence, while the welfare state was not considered enough, since the elderly need more support in daily life, this did not legitimate an extended public sector but individual and market solutions. The critics argued that state-subsidized domestic service implies the privatization of the welfare state. While high-income families can afford to pay for market provided domestic services, unpaid family care would increase among those with lower incomes and "common people". This would involve greater class inequalities between women, the main caregivers. Thus, the need to guarantee universal rights by investing in child care and elderly care was highlighted.

In contrast, "freedom of choice" was as an important discourse among the right-wing parties. From this perspective, people should be free to decide how to manage the balance between work, family and spare time. Women and men should have the same possibilities to combine private and work life, according to their own desires and conditions. But the state should not intervene everywhere; the family knows best how to distribute work and care and they should be free to decide "at the kitchen table". The individual is capable of taking the best decisions in terms of what is best for his/her family. Families should be able to choose among a variety of public and private services, among them domestic services. The norm of gender equality faded away in this discourse on free choice, as well as the class perspective.

Results: comparative perspectives

The case studies explore how gender inequality has been framed as a policy problem in the politics of care in Spain and Sweden. The comparative analysis draws attention to three aspects of the case studies: a) the dominating discourse, shared across Spain and Sweden, surrounding the “reconciliation of work and family life” with the normative assumption of women’s labour market participation as the key to gender equality, b) the national differences in articulating “domestic service” as a policy problem, a salient gender equality issue on the Swedish political agenda and a marginal issue in official debates in Spain, and c) the shifting representations and legitimization of the welfare state.

Reconciliation of work and family life: normative assumptions

The “reconciliation of work and family life” has been articulated as a crucial policy problem in both Spain and Sweden; in Spain this was a “new” debate, whereas in Sweden it was “old”. In both contexts the problem was strongly linked to gender inequality. The debates operated within the premise of women’s labour market participation as the key to gender equality. The dominant vision of gender equality was characterized by the norm of “inclusion”; women should participate in the labour market in the same way as men do, but masculine norms were not challenged (Squires 1999). The focus on employment and economic growth in Spain and Sweden can be seen as an example of how dominant growth has become in politics and how the goal of gender equality has been informed by this neo-liberal discourse (Lombardo, Meier and Verloo 2009; Rönnblom 2009). When gender equality is understood in relation to growth, women’s participation in the labour market is seen to be mainly about changing women in order to make them fit the labour market demands and expectations, as articulated in the idea of “women’s employability”. Women’s subordinate role in the paid labour market was often viewed as caused by women’s primary role in unpaid care and domestic work. As such, fathers were attributed an important role in terms of sharing care and domestic work with women, thereby facilitating women’s labour market participation. The heterosexual family with children was often the implicit norm. The discourse on reconciliation of work and family life has privileged inequalities produced by gender and the man/woman binary and tended to conceive the “home” as oppressive while paid work in the public sphere was viewed as emancipatory (Mohammad 2004). The “working mother” appeared as the central subject in this gender equality discourse given the unequal distribution of unpaid care and domestic work. Working mothers operated as a normative and exclusionary category implicitly associated with white, heterosexual, middle-class autochthonous women. The analysis indicates a discursive shift away from the norm of “male breadwinner” model in the Spanish case, whereas in Sweden the “dual earner” model has dominated for decades.

Employment was emphasized, both in the name of economic growth and of gender equality. The similarities between the Swedish and Spanish debates can be understood in the light of the supranational context of the European Union, where gender equality measures have been shaped by the agenda of creating employment and the European Employment Strategy (Outshoorn and Kantola 2007; Stratigaki 2004; Rubery 2002). Researchers have pointed out that the changes in the European welfare states have

involved a general shift towards a “dual earner” model assuming women’s involvement in the labour market as the norm. However, European Union policies emphasize employment, global competitiveness, and the problems of ageing populations and low birth rates. As policies in the European Union have tended to stress the importance of employment and women’s labour market participation has been prioritized over care-related needs, dominant discourses have generally elevated the “ethics of work”, not the “ethics of care” (Williams 2010). As we have seen in the analysis, the association of paid work with success and emancipation can be said to overshadow problems of discrimination, exploitation and inequalities in work life. Moreover, the association of paid work with emancipation, autonomy, self-realization and choice can be argued to reflect the experience of relatively privileged women. Nancy Fraser argues that any employment-centred welfare state model will have difficulties in constructing a respectable status for those defined as “non-workers”; by valorizing paid work, it implicitly devalues unpaid work. While paid employment is crucially important for women, we need to reflect critically on the convergence of “women’s interests” with the interests of global capitalism (Fraser 2009; Hrženjak 2007; Barker 2005). In the name of female emancipation, paid work seems to be further appraised, and this vision of gender equality is based on the negation of class.

Domestic service: context-bound silences

The analysis of the policy debates surrounding domestic service shows how an issue can become a contentious problem on the political agenda in one national context while in another context it is a marginal issue on the agenda. It also shows how an issue can be considered essentially linked to gender equality in one context and be rather disconnected from gender equality in another.

Why has domestic service become such a controversial issue on the agenda in Sweden and not in Spain? In Sweden domestic service has been articulated as an important policy problem within a dominating discourse on gender equality. Gender equality has been a dominant discourse in politics for a long time in Sweden (Magnusson, Rönnblom and Silius 2008). Gender equality has been constructed as part of the national identity (Towns 2002) and the idea of “maids” as controversial in Sweden can be understood in the light of the notion of Swedishness as international leadership in gender equality and welfare state issues (Gavanas 2006). The issue of paid domestic work was highly controversial but none of the actors questioned that domestic service was crucially related to gender (in)equality. Left-wing voices linked domestic service to the exploitation of working-class and immigrant women. Fomenting domestic service jobs would increase gender inequality due to the predominance of precarious feminized work in the domestic service sector. Women and men should share care and domestic work instead of externalizing the work to “other” women. Right-wing parties argued that domestic service would increase equality providing opportunities for women to participate in the labour market on an equal footing with men. In the end, the right-wing parties’ discourse, characterized by the norms of individualism, freedom of choice and work ethics, and the emphasis on women liberating themselves from unpaid work to dedicate themselves to professional careers, and the left-wing parties’ focus on the norm

of women and men's sharing care and domestic work provided little room for domestic workers' voices.

In contrast, gender equality policies are relatively new in Spain. However, many policy measures have been adopted to promote gender equality in the last decade. The Socialist Party in the government in Spain since 2004 made gender equality a central issue on the political agenda and during this government the Equality Act was adopted. But there has been no political consensus on the importance of the issue. Overall, the official policy discourse on gender equality has not included the issue of domestic service or domestic workers rights. In contrast to Sweden, the perpetuation of the sexual division of labour, along class and race/ethnic relations, by means of transferring care and domestic work to working-class and migrant women has not been challenged. Domestic workers were the invisible "other" in gender equality policies that privileged middle-class families' interests and working mothers' problems of reconciling work and family life (Peterson 2007). Class inequalities were generally an ignored problem in the discourse surrounding gender equality, in contrast to the frequency by which class inequalities appeared in the Swedish debates (among left-wing MPs).

In the Spanish parliamentary debate from 2005 domestic service was considered necessary to make family and work life feasible given women's labour market participation. The advocacy for domestic workers' rights contrasted with a neo-liberal discourse, where economic growth and employment was privileged. Domestic service was constructed as a viable solution to welfare state problems, which contrast with Swedish left wing parties' opposition towards such individual and private solutions. In contrast to the Swedish right-wing parties efforts to articulate paid domestic work as "just another job", in Spain domestic service has been articulated as essentially different within the institutional framework of the Social Security system. The reform of the Special Regime for Domestic Workers recently initiated by the government reinforces domestic service as a question of workers' rights, but not as a question of gender equality.

Legitimizing the welfare state: "women friendliness" and beyond

Instead of assuming the existence of a women-friendly welfare state in general terms, I have explored the ways in which policy debates legitimize the welfare state, negotiate its boundaries and construct it as "women-friendly" –or not.

In Spain, the welfare state has been extended and developed in some areas during the last decade, for instance, in elderly care and in the right to paternity leave. The Dependent Care Act was articulated as developing the welfare state towards a more women-friendly state, helping liberate women from "care" and allow them to "work". However, private and individual solutions to the problem of care remained generally unchallenged. The wide-ranging acceptance of domestic service as a form of care provision can be seen as reinforcing the legitimacy of the "non-caring state". The Swedish welfare state has been represented as women-friendly, in terms of helping women to combine work and family life and in terms of employing many women in the public sector, mainly among the left wing parties. By the same token, it has been generally recognized that welfare state retrenchment has affected women in particular, as workers in the public sector and as unpaid care workers. Thus, the analysis shows that the

Swedish welfare state was not considered as women-friendly as it had used to be. “Freedom of choice” was an important discourse among the right-wing parties. The right-wing Alliance in government since 2006 has argued in favour of reducing state responsibilities, restructuring social benefits and services, fomenting private initiatives and emphasizing individual responsibility. From this perspective, the state should not intervene everywhere; the family should be free to decide how to manage the balance between work, family and spare time. The individual is capable of taking the best decisions in terms of what is best for his/her family. The Act on tax credits for domestic services has been considered to enhance families’ freedom of choice. The norm of gender equality faded away in this free choice discourse. In conclusion, the Swedish debates were shifting away from the discourse on the women-friendly welfare state towards a strong focus on freedom of choice.

In this thesis I have argued that the very notion of a “women-friendly” welfare state is challenged by the developments in feminist thought, which question any unitary understandings of the category “women”. Gender must be understood as inherently interlocked with categories such as class, race/ethnicity and sexuality (Butler 1990). The category “women” is both normative and exclusionary. Following from this, I have developed the concept of political intersectionality as an analytical tool to analyze normative assumptions and exclusion, and the ways in which the discourses provide certain subject positions in a given context (Dahl 2000). My argument is that the welfare state cannot be seen as “women-friendly” or “unfriendly” in general terms, but in-depth empirical studies can reveal how specific public policies construct gender and gender (in)equality and help us interpret potential empowering or disempowering effects. The analysis emphasizes that social policies designed to create gender equality can marginalize “other” women by privileging certain categories of women and men. The analysis illustrates this in various ways. For instance, both in the Spanish and Swedish context, the “working mother” appeared as a central subject in the gender equality discourse, with reference to the unequal distribution of unpaid care and domestic work. Working mothers operated as a normative category explicitly or implicitly associated with white, heterosexual, middle- (or upper-) class autochthonous women. The association of paid work with choice, emancipation and success can be argued to reflect the experience of relatively privileged women ignoring the implications of class. At the same time, the dominant view of gender equality was characterized by a liberal discourse of “inclusion” according to which women should participate in the labour market in the same way as men do, requiring women’s adaptation to labour market requirements and privileging, not challenging, masculine norms.

Annex

MAGEEQ Methodology of Critical Frame Analysis

Super-text template (Verloo and Lombardo 2007)

NUMBER/CODE/TITLE

- Full title
- Country
- Issue
- Date
- Type/status of document
- Actor(s) and gender actor(s) if applicable
- Audience
- Event/reason/occasion of appearance
- Parts of text eliminated

Voice

SUMMARY

- Voice(s) speaking
- Perspective
- References: words/concepts (and where they come from)
- References: actors
- References: documents

Diagnosis

SUMMARY

- What is represented as the problem?
- Why is it seen as a problem?
- Causality (what is seen as the cause?)
- Dimensions of gender (social categories/identity/ behavior/norms and symbols/institutions)
- Intersectionality
- Mechanisms (resources/ norms and interpretations/legitimization of violence)
- Form (argumentation/ style/ conviction techniques/ dichotomies/metaphors/contrast)
- Location (organization of labor/ organization of intimacy/ organization of citizenship)

Attribution of roles in the diagnosis

SUMMARY

- Causality (who is seen to have caused the problem?)
- Responsibility (who is seen as responsible for the problem?)
- Problem holders (whose problem is it seen to be?)
- Normativity (what is the norm group if there is a problem group?)
- Active/ passive roles (perpetuators/ victims, etc.)
- Legitimation of non-problem(s)

Prognosis

SUMMARY

- What to do?
- Hierarchy/ priority of goals
- How to achieve goals (strategy/ means/ instruments?)
- Dimensions of gender (social categories/identity/ behavior/norms and symbols/institutions)
- Intersectionality
- Mechanisms (resources/ norms and interpretations/legitimization of violence)
- Form (argumentation/ style/ conviction techniques/ dichotomies/metaphors/contrast)
- Location (organization of labour/ organization of intimacy/ organization of citizenship)

Attribution of roles in prognosis

SUMMARY

- Call for action and non-action (who should do what?)
- Who has a voice in suggesting suitable course of action?
- Who is acted upon? (target groups)
- Boundaries set to action
- Legitimation on (non)action

Normativity

SUMMARY

- What is seen as good?
- What is seen as bad?
- Location of norms in the text (diagnosis/prognosis/elsewhere)

Balance

SUMMARY

- Emphasis on different dimensions/ elements
- Frictions or contradictions within dimensions/elements

Comments

The author

This thesis was written in the framework of a four-year PhD fellowship FPU (2005-2009) of the Spanish Ministry of Education and Science. Elin Peterson has conducted research on policies related to gender, work and care in the framework of the European research projects MAGEEQ (*Policy Frames and Implementation Problems – the case of gender mainstreaming* 2003-2005) and QUING (*Quality in Gender + Equality Policies* 2006-2010). In different stages of the development of this thesis, she has been a visiting researcher at Bristol University (UK), Lund University (Sweden) and Roskilde University (Denmark). During the process of writing this thesis, Elin has also written and published various book chapters and articles on gender inequality, care and welfare states; two articles were peer-reviewed and published in the *European Journal of Women's Studies* and *NORA Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* (co-authored). As a PhD candidate, Elin has taught public policy at the Faculty of Political Science and Sociology at Complutense University of Madrid. She has also taught gender and policy analysis at various Master's Programs in Gender Studies at Complutense University of Madrid and Autónoma University of Madrid. Additionally, her teaching experience comprises various annual courses at the Bachelor's degree in Politics and International Relations of the external program of London School of Economics in Madrid: Politics of the European Union, International Political Theory, Introduction to International Relations and Nationalism and International Relations.